

THE ADVENTURES IN MODERN MUSIC

# WIRED

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## The Residents

A user's guide

## Secret Museum of Mankind

Voices from a gone world

## Gary Lucas's

Jukebox

## Bob Ostertag

Lesser

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# inside

your monthly exploration of new music

## 10 Bites

**Lesser Grating gearhound** **Peaches** Super mull! big fuzz **John Schott** Angelic elegist

## 16 Go To Commercial

From Raymond Scott's Manhattan Research Inc. to Michael Jackson's then curl catching fire, advertising has placed taxing demands on musicians' ingenuity and skill. By Ken Hollings

## 18 Secret Museum Of Mankind

Drawing upon his treasure trove of ancient vinyl relics and arcane instruments, postman Pat Conte conducts CD sessions that summon the musical spirits and ghosts of long lost worlds. By Richard Henderson

## 26 Tortoise

Climbing out of their shells, Chicago's premier post-rockers reveal to David Keenan how their new album redefines their standards even as it reaffirms their hardcore roots

## 34 Bob Ostertag's Yugoslavian Diary

In these exclusive diary extracts, the American composer/improvisor goes behind Serbian lines and confronts audience and police hostility while attempting to perform a work about the NATO bombings

## 42 The Primer: The Residents

Edwin Pouncey peers into the famous eyeballs to explore the adventurous, satirical and groundbreaking sonic world of the Californian group that has defied attempts to unmask them for three decades

## 50 Invisible Jukebox: Gary Lucas

The former Captain Beefheart guitarist screams and crows about records by Charles Mingus, Dr. Noe, Maria Sebastian, Jeff Buckley, Tsuyuhito, Leonard Bernstein and more. Tested by Mike Barnes

# reviews

- 54 Soundcheck** February's selected albums and singles, including new releases from Thomas Brinkmann, Brokenback, Cosy Fanni Tutti, Loren Mazzacane Connors, Vladislav Delaj, Burnt Friedman, Key Hano & Derek Bailey, Hugh Hopper, Jan Jelinek, Elvin Jones, Thomas Lehr, Marciay/Moore/Rinaldo, Ennio Morricone, Toshimaru Nakamura, Stacey Pullen, Reynolds, Rums, 2nd Gen, Wadada Leo Smith, David Thomas & Two Pale Boys, Keith Tippett, Tortoise, Jah Wobble & Evan Parker, Warhorse and more. **76 Print Run** New music books. A life and death study of Tim and Jeff Buckley. The history of recording. Jazzy literary theory. Free jazz rabble-rousing. The life of Leon Theremin. **82 Multimedia** Peter Shapiro meets Ian Holliswell, Brighton's maverick film maker and soundtracker. **84 On Location** Japanorama in Exeter, Ats Tak in Berlin, A Silver Mt Zion in Glasgow, Magnetic Fields in London

- 4 Special Announcement** **6 Letters** **14 Global Ear** Biba Kopf gets plucky with Tsugaru shamisen. **12 Bitstream** News from music's outer limits. **75 Charts** **80 Label Directory** **88 Out There** February's selected festivals, happenings, live events, clubs and radio. **96 Back Issues** **97 Subscribe** and get FREE CDs or FREE mags! **98 Epiphanies** Dave Mandl's debt to Public Service

Pat Conte's Secret Museum page 18

Tortoise page 26

Gary Lucas page 50

# WIRE

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# declaration of independence

**T**hursday 21 December 2000 was a historic date in the Wire magazine's 18 year lifespan. On that day, the six current full-time members of *The Wire* staff completed a management buy-out of the title, purchasing it from its previous owners, Namara Ltd.

Namara had originally bought *The Wire* in 1984 from its founder Anthony Wood, who had started the magazine two years earlier. The decision by Namara to sell the title after 16 years was taken due to the impending retirement of its Chairman, Nam Atallah. Rather than see the magazine be taken over by another publishing house, the staff put together a bid in order to facilitate a management buy-out. That bid was successful and the final buy-out price was raised by way of a combination of secured loans, outside investment and capital raised by the staff. The staff has formed a new company, Current Media Ltd, which will function as a holding company for *The Wire* Magazine Ltd. *The Wire* Magazine Ltd will continue to operate as a limited company.

So there you have it. Ownership of *The Wire* by the people who actually work to produce the thing month in, month out represents the best possible news for both the magazine and its readers. We want to assure all readers, subscribers, advertisers, musicians, labels, distributors, promoters, and other interested parties, that there will be no change to the magazine's level of coverage of the world's most creative and challenging music in all genres. If anything, that coverage will grow even more intense and wide-ranging. The magazine is in sound financial health and will continue to publish monthly. We will also continue to offer readers and

subscribers a selection of exclusive free new music CDs, as well as pursuing our involvements in various international music festivals and concerts and substantially expanding the parameters of our Website. Above all, *The Wire* is now 100 per cent independent, not owned by any larger publishing consortium, a factor which we think is essential given the continued assimilation of more and more music titles under fewer roofs. This means that *The Wire* is now the most widely read independent music magazine produced in the UK, and one of the few that actually has a readership that is growing in size.

Coincidentally, our buy-out occurred in the same week that two of the UK's most high-profile music publications, *Melody Maker* and *Select*, were closed down by their respective publishers, IPC and EMAP. The failure of these titles is yet another indictment of a publishing industry which continues to reduce and streamline the choice of music coverage available to the public, and to neglect so-called marginal sounds and specialist listening – exactly the kind of amazing musical creativity and diversity which rocks *The Wire's* world, in fact.

We remain committed to a global perspective on the music of our time, our content is never driven by PR or the bottom line, and we refuse to underestimate the intelligence of our readers. Pursuing that policy has enabled us to turn the magazine into a healthy, vibrant enterprise over the past six years, and as *The Wire* enters a dynamic new phase, the road ahead appears wider than ever.

**CHRIS BORN, TONY MERRINGTON, BEN HOSSE, ANNE NICE MESET, ANOT TAIT, ROB YOUNG**  
Directors, Current Media/The Wire

**The March issue of The Wire will be on sale on Tuesday 27 February**

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# letters

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In a jam: Mark E. Smith

## First class oaf

Nice to see Mark E. Smith making a first class oaf of himself on the pages of your magazine — now there's a first I am, of course, referring to his appearance in *Invincible Jukebox* (*The Wire* 203), and his summary dismissal of Chris Morris's *Blue Jam* after only a handful of seconds listening, brushing the whole thing aside with some crass comments about politicians and comedians being rock stars.

He obviously didn't have the first clue what the thing is about. When *Blue Jam* was broadcast on the radio it was presented as an off the wall comedy production, which was exactly what it was — it had absolutely fuck all to do with being a dodgy stab at rock stardom. I've never heard Chris Morris make any claims to be a musician, and while *Blue Jam* employs music for dramatic/ironic effect, it is stated quite categorically that this music is performed by other people. It's not like Chris Morris jumped out of bed one morning shouting, "Hoyyyy! I think I'll be a rock star today." I'd guess that "a stab at the charts" was the furthest thing from Morris's mind when working on *Blue Jam*, and the CD release was more to do with Warp Records (several of their artists feature on its soundtracks) seeing the opportunity to earn some royalties for their artists (and why not?).

I only hope Morris gets to read the interview and, given the musical choices used in his sketches

(*Labrador*, *Alpha Twin*, *Autschke*, *Funkie Porcino*, etc.), he just might be a *Wire* reader. Then we might get to see 'old meat pie head' put firmly in his place in the next series of *Blue Jam*. That really would be something to look forward to.

Johnny Blackmail Manchester

## Dead House

I see in the *Bistream* column (*The Wire* 203) that you attribute my closure of *LuHouse Records* to disillusionment and ego conflicts. This is only part right. Certainly I have experienced some very off-putting behaviour and attitudes in both the business and the fanbase alike, but the main reason is actually a bit more mundane. Quite simply, other commitments would have prevented me from being able to spend 'hands-on' time building the label up into the respectable organ that John Fahey, Paul Kelly and I had hoped it

would become. Some people will translate that statement as 'it wasn't making enough money', and in all probability it wouldn't have done. So, if you like, I'll play the role of big bad businessman (on my turnover?) and plead guilty as charged to that one, even though it was hardly the point. After all, if I'd gone corporate, I'd probably have gotten more help and money than would have been useful.

However, I must point out that any suggestion of ego conflicts just isn't true. I did observe to a couple of people that at the time of closure we had not agreed on a second or third title to release. That was not an

ego thing: it was all three of us being properly cautious about the complex trade-offs that exist between reputation, quality and profit. I'm sure you'll all have heard this one before, but truthfully, we three do remain very good friends. In terms of asset ownership, *LuHouse* was my label, but each of us knew it needed different inputs from each individual for the thing to work, and in that sense it was a very equal partnership. If saying we were not prepared to 'play at it' or to release something we weren't all happy with just for the sake of doing so is ego tripping, then so be it. I don't think any of us saw it that way, and in fact from where

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I'm sitting, the very contrary is true  
**Danny Letham** Rhyl, Denbighshire

The suggestion of ego conflicts came from your original press release announcing the closure of the label, which said "To run with the quality product that was my ambition for the label, I have concluded that I would need the skills to motivate the unmotivated and resolve ego conflicts that pole the Middle East crisis into insignificance." — Ed

## Rewound up

Re: Rewind 2000 (The Wire 203) Being a music writer myself, I was quite surprised by your Rewind 2000 overview of the year with the two and the three zeroes. It is the first time since I read The Wire that I couldn't find any record that I cherished myself this year. Where's Toshiklubs, Omco, Janek Schaefer, Phthalogynnie, Martin Tereau, Pimmon, Jake Mandell, and all the others that made 2000 a great year for music? There's two possibilities: either I've been listening to the wrong music in 2000, or you have swiftly taken a direction with your magazine that I don't particularly like. Anyway, here's my pick of the past year:

1. Various — Across The Cell Wall (Kodama)
2. Various — Toshiklubs Presents State Of The Art Heimborn (Toshiklubs)
3. Crank — Hejtbog (Mile Plateaux)
4. Phthalogynnie — 25 Tracks For 1 Track (Planet Mu)
5. Kaldog — The Soccergod Ep (Carpark)
6. Pimmon — Knetika (K-RAA-K)
7. Synthesme — Inghitsawell (Aim)
8. Janek Schaefer — Above Buildings (Fat Cat)
9. Various — Sound Options (System Technologies)
10. Various — Commercial Ad Hoc (Illegal Art)

Also greatly enjoyed the Stoetraum compilation (—scape), the Wire's The Mess comp (Noise Museum), SET's Pod (Ash International (RIP)), the two Treuauit CDs that came out this year (on Erstwhile and Ambiances Magnetiques), Jacob Mandell's Undying (Kodama) and all the stuff that came out on the magnificent Erstwhile label.

**Peter Wullen** via e-mail

The Rewind charts are an aggregate of the votes cast by our contributors, not a manufactured statement of editorial policy. During 2000 we featured Kaldog issue 1941, who was voted runner-up Record Of The Year, for his Down With The Scene album. Pimmon and Janek Schaefer (both 201), many of the records and compilations you list were reviewed over the year. — Ed

The Wire's Rewind 2000 (The Wire 203) was, as usual, a fabulous and extensive review of the best music of the last year. And thanks for listing our Sprawl Prim album, we obviously appreciate all the support we've had from The Wire over the past five years or so of Sprawlism.

But we can't help noticing there was no mention of the Groundswell event Sprawl organised, this was

surely a unique amalgam of Mega/Song/s—scape! OHR/Mile Plateaux artists, as well as David Toop, Kaffe Matthews vs Fennest, not seen on the same bill before in London. It was a massive artistic success, and it also brought to light the fact that, besides The Wire's events and our own, not much is done on a regular basis in London to broaden the horizon of the capital's sonic landscape by inviting in the more exciting international artists. As yet, London sadly has no festival comparable to Sonar, Mutek, etc. — a situation which Groundswell sought to rectify. Hopefully we might one day have the more active environment that other cities enjoy.

**Douglas Benford & Iris Garrells, The Sprawl** London

## Come clean

I think it should be pointed out to readers who don't live in Glasgow that David Keenan's and Stephen Pastel's displeasure at the closure of John Smith's Record Shop (Rewind 2000, The Wire 203) may have something to do with the fact that they both worked in it.

**Gregor Peat** Glasgow

## How low can you go?

I was interested to read the review by Jim Haynes of the "0 CD 0000 (The Wire 203). I've not heard the piece myself yet but I have been working on sound works at extremely low frequencies, so was intrigued by Jim's inability to hear the 14Hz frequency. Unless this is a misprint, something seems wrong somewhere. Although the upper range of a CD is effectively 22,050Hz, I have recorded pieces as low as 1Hz and certainly you hear something at 14Hz — listen to the enclosed CD-R [We're listening — Ed]. Below about 10Hz, you become aware of air movement rather than sound and the 1Hz piece is best appreciated with the speaker cover off, a gentle movement in and out of the bass speaker. I intend releasing some of these pieces from ~22,050Hz to 1Hz later this year and I am presently working on sub-1Hz pieces.

**James Whitehead (JLIAT)** Walsingham  
[www.jlat.demon.co.uk](http://www.jlat.demon.co.uk)

## Folk implosion

I was very disappointed to read the British Folk Primer by Ed Baxter (The Wire 202). It was hardly representative of Britain, with no Scottish or Welsh music mentioned and only one Irish singer. The rich heritage of dance music was completely ignored and one cannot realistically omit Martin Carthy, Bert Jansch and The Watsons from any look at British folk music.

I know that knowledge of the history and heritage of a genre is important, but none of the albums mentioned contained recordings made after 1970. The article gave the impression that British folk music is a thing of the past when the opposite is true, and the scene is awash with talented, youthful musicians. Has he not heard of Eliza Carthy, Kate Rusby, Catriona

MacDonald, Shoglenity — need I go on?

The pompous, impenetrable prose, the crass generalisations and the factual errors did not help the article and, frankly, I expect more from a magazine with the reputation of The Wire.

**Michael Kingston** Putney Bar

## Holiday reservations

I am somewhat amazed at the Fairport Convention records chosen in the British Folk Primer. No quilms with *Legs And Lef*, but I have great reservations about *What We Do On Our Holidays*, which I consider a good but flawed piece. The whole synthesis of British folk rock was not finalised at the time of its recording; it is the trilogy of *Unhollowing Legs And Lef* and *Full House* that they would ultimately be known for and either one of the two records mentioned above would have been more representative. One has also to consider the impact that adversity had on these masterpieces, coming as they did after the tragic death of Martin Lamble, and the departure from the group of Sandy Denny and Tiger Hutchinson during this period. That Fairport created music of such brilliance despite this adversity is astonishing; it is comforting to see them still doing quality work some 30 odd years after their inception.

**Luis Torregrosa** Trenton, USA

## Left unconsolable

For your information, I have found a devastating error in the review of Björk's *SelmaSongs* (The Wire 201). David Toop states that Björk's album is titled *Bokur* when in fact nothing could be further from the truth. The album in question is actually titled *Konkur*, which apparently means "onion doves". The album was created by Björk and Baldur. While I do generally agree with Toop's brief synopsis of *Konkur* ("a fantastic evocation of certain... atmospheres"), I must say that I would think an album which receives such an eloquent if brief description would also merit a look at the very sparse liner notes!

**Daniel** via e-mail

## Form follows function

Apart from the wonderful articles provided, I'd like to compliment your art direction. The Wire is a triumph of visual clarity, economy and accessibility. When it comes to delivery of information, the best design is design that you don't notice. Clean layout, tasteful photo editing and pleasant fonts dominate — whereas other periodicals terrify the eye with banal graphic tawdriness. Cheers!

**Dave Rosenkrans** Seattle, USA

## Correction

Issue 203: In the Rewind 2000 section, the compilation *Le Jazz Neri* was incorrectly stated to be on the Norwegian label Rune Grammofon; it is actually on Smalltown Supersound.





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# bites



## Lesser A minor glitch

Turn of the century San Francisco is contested territory, and nowhere more so than the Mission District, a traditionally Latino neighborhood adopted some years ago as a promising low-rent district by a cadre of artists and musicians. Both groups have been affected by the dot.com boom: office space leases for astronomical sums, longtime residents face increasing evictions and a swanky oxygen bar has opened up just blocks from a traditional botanica store — the definition of the place is as unstable as the tectonic plates beneath it. So it's no small irony that my interview with J. Lesser (né Jason Doerck) takes place here, not far from the apartment where most of his gear is stored, pending his own likely eviction. He's taken the landlords to court, but in the meantime his studio is inaccessible. The digital boom giveth (Lesser's day job at a local Internet company, for instance, as well as the platform that makes his music possible in the first place), but at the same time it taketh away.

I'll admit to having my trepidations about meeting Lesser, instantly recognizable for his David Crosby mustache as he crosses the street. After all, this is the ex-punk who kicked off his career with a cassette entitled *I Hate Me*, packaged with a razor blade and four

hits of (fake) LSD, who describes his former persona as "not a hellion, but a troublemaker, certainly," who kicked off an inadvertent controversy with a track entitled "Markus Popp Can Kiss My Redneck Ass" and a record sleeve featuring a love letter to a male order bride, William T. Vollmann for the laptop crowd, perhaps.

Except that J. Lesser turns out to be exceedingly good-natured, almost soft spoken and given to poking fun at his own persona. "I've just gotten older," he claims, "so I'm not so angry and pissed off at everyone." But Lesser's music remains plenty confrontational. Gearhead, his new album on Matador, opens with a squeal of noise, grunting and botched power chords, and over the next hour careers from DSP (digital signal processing) explosion to dubfooted HipHop and back again. Despite Lesser's past excursions into decomposed drum 'n' bass, and his loose affiliation with the Bay Area's digital Techno crowd, Gearhead sees him moving far away from any kind of dancefloor tradition, privileging noisy drift over beat-driven structure in an industry where even nose artists are often marketed within a club culture context; it puts Lesser in an odd position. "I've never done dance music, or House, or any of that stuff," he explains. "It was always more about punk, and bands like Big Black, and that's all where my heart's. I feel not uncomfortable, but strange that I'm in this sort of halfway dance community. It was weird to be in England, where a DJ would play one of my tracks and people would be dancing to it. I never would have imagined people would react like that."

Doubtless, Lesser's reaction is conditioned by his upbringing in San Diego. After a long stint playing in local punk groups and touring with A Minor Forest, he tried of the tight-knit scene's stultification, and in 1994 allowed himself to be coaxed up to San Francisco, where the burgeoning electronic music community suggested another outlet for disaffected sounds. Today Lesser's collaborators include Kid606, Marmos (with whom he tours and records as a "silent" third partner) and the similarly frenetic Blectum From Bledidom. For all of these artists, the Bay Area has become a proving ground for a new model of electronic experimentation, sprung free from genre and unconcerned with dancefloor use value.

Much like Kid606, Lesser makes self-referentiality a key part of his repertoire: hence tracks like "On The Kids' Tip," acknowledging and lampooning the digital anxiety of influence, and "Matador Records Tax Deduction," underscoring the likely limited prospects for Gearhead's commercial success. "Obligatory Glitch Worship" skewers the digital shibboleth even as the now ubiquitous glitch serves as the paving stone for Disc. Lesser's occasional collaboration with Matmos and Kid606, which since 1994 has released several records' worth of music grounded entirely in samples of skipping CDs.

Any reference to a CD made of skipping CDs, of course, must recall Oval, for whom Lesser proclaims "nothing but respect." The contentious track title, he avers, was an offhand inside joke referring to Lesser's perception of American electronica's stepchild status in the mid-90s, ignored and overshadowed by Europe's imports. The comment may not have helped Lesser's relationship with some European — and even American — artists, labels and promoters, but in the wake of European interest in the Bay Area's output, there's no denying that by 2001 the tables have turned.

But as more and more local venues shut down — one of the city's most promising new spaces was recently evicted to make way for the raising of the site and the construction of a new office building — San Francisco's electronic musicians are forced into the strictly formatted spaces of dance clubs and art galleries, neither of which is particularly appealing to Lesser. "I can't imagine going and playing a rave. Whenever I play venues where there's a DJ and people are dancing, it's just so weird. And then of course I feel really weird playing a place where everyone is sitting down being quiet and being totally respectful. I'm used to rock clubs and touring with A Minor Forest, and I'm used to people being pissed and throwing bottles and stuff when I'm playing, not sitting in some kind of reverie." In many ways the old punk aesthetic dies hard, although Lesser admits, "It's kind of an old card to play. But I love rock clubs — the sound's always fuckin' shiny, and people are yelling, and people are more willing to tell you what they think while you're doing it. I really, really hate when you play and people are sitting down and being very respectful. That to me is the worst — that's the worst thing I could ever play." **PHILIP SHEERBURNE** Gearhead is out this month on Matador.

# Peaches

She's got balls

"The four of us picked an instrument and started singing about cock and pussy and stuff," says Peaches (aka 33-year-old Canadian born Merrill Nisker), recalling her first group, The Sht. Singing about genitalia was apparently the consequence of sexual tensions among the group's members, and sex remains the driving force behind *The Teaches Of Peaches*, Nisker's debut as a solo artist. This extraordinary record blends the urgency and restlessness of early Suicide with the sexual intensity of a woman on heat: imagine a female Frankie Teardrop reincarnated as a sexed-up rock chick with nothing to lose, desperate to make her mark on a grey, male, corporate world. "My goal is to rock," Nisker declares, e-mailing from Berlin, her current home where, through her association with the Kitty-Yo label, she recently produced the *Red Leather EP* in collaboration with that other high-energy extrovert, Gonzales. "Rock and sex are so closely related. I like to have fun with it, and not be an 'angry woman' or fall into feminist traps. I'm going for the gut, not the intellect."

In response to her dissatisfaction with the way the arts were taught to her as a child — "It was all structure and no creativity" — Nisker became a teacher, developing a drama/music programme for three to six year olds. "I learned so much from how kids are, and with Peaches I try to find the five year old that we all still have in us

somewhere. Kids have pure creativity because they don't have a libido yet, adults have their creativity muted up and coloured by libido."

Attracted to the immediacy of the stage, she initially wanted to become a theatre director, but soon found it too staid for her taste and turned to music. Instead. Since electronica is not noted for its spontaneity, it might seem odd that Peaches switched the electric guitar she used in The Sht for a Roland Groovebox MC 505 (which she calls her "MCS"), but unlike the stereotypical bedroom electronica artist she doesn't care much for sound processing or complex production. "I don't give a shit about tweaking and waiting. I just use technology to make things easier," she says, adding that using the 505 is "not exactly rocket science", making it the perfect vehicle for her cheap electro-punk. Peaches is not about perfecting her musicianship, but harnessing repetitive, throbbing energy.

The keys to Nisker's success (she has already drawn appreciative audiences in Europe and the US) are confidence and self-belief. "I just told people I was sexy and then they started to believe it." The album sleeve, a close-up photo of her crotch clad in plastic hotpants, is an objectification she welcomes — "the picture's raw penis and reds pinpoint exactly where the music emanates from. 'Close shots of body parts are my way of putting an absurd spin on the thing," she explains.

This willingness to expose herself has been known to ignite her audiences to cast off their own inhibitions. "In Hamburg," she recalls, "this girl jumped up on stage,

wiped the sweat off my chest, went back into the audience, spread my sweat on her boyfriend's lips and started making out with him. I like it when the audience bursts out.

"We all have male and female in us. I like to exercise both sides — women can appreciate their own sexuality, but somehow some men can't find their own self or other males attractive, so they focus too much on women. I end up making out with girls and guys on stage, and a lot of couples tell me that they have to go and have sex during or right after the show."

Nisker's libido-infused playfulness has also extended to film making. In 1999, she was asked to contribute a short film to a Toronto film festival. The result, *Chromosome XXX*, is an erotic lesbian short featuring two women rubbing themselves against huge motorcycles, which she has incorporated into her live shows. "We made the movie in one hour and made no edits. From there I started to collaborate with friends and make quick, fast, cheap 'attitude movies'. One is about me wearing big balls around my neighbourhood."

Does she worry that, by foregrounding her sexuality, her music might be overlooked? "Actually," she says, "I find it somewhat of a compliment when people stop talking about you as a musician, because there is so much more to the image than just the music. I consider myself an entertainer first and foremost. I'm dirty, messy and I don't give a fuck." **ANNE HILDE MESEIT** The Teaches Of Peaches and Peaches And Gonzales's Red Leather EP are out now on Kitty-Yo.





## John Schott

### Angelic upstart

The work of Californian guitarist and composer John Schott cuts across a bewildering variety of genres. Last year's *Ghost Of Electricity* (Songlines) was a remarkable collection of original "hymns, stomps, hollers, anarchic strum-alongs and border region musics" intended as a commentary on the field recordings and anthologies of Alan Lomax and Harry Smith. The album featured the group Junk Genius, of which Schott is a guiding spirit. But his own *Shuffle Play: Elegies For The Recording Angel* (reviewed in *The Wire* 202) is his most ambitious release to date. It explores old recordings not through a studio-created mosaic, as in plunderphonics, but by overlaying quite lengthy extracts with contemporary composition and improvisation.

The project began with Schott's obsession with an 1897 recording of the African-American folk song "Poor Mourner." Virtually all the performances on the album are connected with it, in the manner of Christian Wolff's use of folk material. Other recordings of a similar vintage are juxtaposed with contemporary sounds in striking ways. The CD is meant to be played in random mode, hence its title. "It was a very free associative exercise. I wanted to make a record about records," Schott explains. "The economics wouldn't allow for the rehearsal or equipment to do justice to it live. Records are records and performances are performances."

*Shuffle Play* attempts to exploit the musical resources of the past while breaking out of the "tribute" tendency "the plays the music of." "I tried," he elaborates, "is an assertion of the canon at a time when the musical world can no longer take such things for granted. But it can become almost a kind of necrophilia. Not just in the young bebop music scene here in America, but even in the avant-garde scene where every piece is dedicated to some great master, like Herbie Nichols or Joe Harris." Schott feels he has been part of that too, with his successful jazz funk outfit TJ Kirk, which

reworked compositions by Thelonious Monk, Roland Kirk and James Brown.

*Shuffle Play* reflects Schott's absorption with the aesthetics of recording; he is surprised that classical composers aren't more inspired by the resources of the studio by the recording as artistic medium. "Thinking about my favourite musicians or composers—Schoenberg or Elliott Carter, or Miles or Monk—I realised that in a certain way that I loved was records of their music. Also Glenn Gould is a big inspiration—his mistrust of the live performance is very interesting to me though it's not my particular aesthetic."

Aged 34, Schott now lives in Berkeley, California. Born in Seattle, his schoolmates, he says, ended up in groups like Pearl Jam and Guns N' Roses. Others formed the cream of the New York avant-jazz scene, notably Michael Sann, Jim Black, Brad Shapik and Chris Speed. There's a great range of musical reference in his work, from serial composition, modern jazz and Country Blues, Boulez via Monk to James Brown. "For a long time I had two separate roles. I was studying with jazz musicians like Gary Peacock, Jerry Granelli and Julian Priester, and also with classical composers. I wrote notated music that had no relationship with the jazz. I was also playing, not to mention the country blues. I was studying or the rock 'n' roll I'd grown up listening to. It's only the result of a long process, a lot of work, that these areas have started to lead into each other."

One indication of that process was the album in *These Great Times* from 1997, for John Zorn's Tzadik label. A song cycle for classical tenor voice with texts from Kafka, Karl Kraus and others. It features Schott with regular partners Trevor Dunn and Kenny Wollesen on bass and drums. This dark, brooding work focuses more clearly on his Jewish roots than all of his other releases. For *Great Times* he aimed to produce "Schoenbergian writing for the electric guitar that is nevertheless domestic. It was interesting to try and connect with Schoenberg's harmonic language on my instrument, and to try and take what I've learned from that music, and express it as an improviser." It is possible to improvise in a 12-tone way—avoiding repeating each tone until all the others have been heard? "The non-repetition aspect is not at all of interest to me. Much more interesting is tracing connections through all the notes, and placing each note into a mosaic of association."

Another major influence was Stefan Wolpe, who died in 1972 after teaching generations of American composers to "lilt with chords, and wring at chords, and then pounce on them." "One thing that Wolpe did," says Schott, "was the notion of taking a vertical harmony and immediately repeating the tones in other octaves, and shuffling the voicings of chords and projecting them in different ways." This suggested a fruitful approach to improvisation: "One of the problems for me with free improvisation is the lack of a feeling for harmonic rhythm. A lot of it became bad 12-tone music. Free improvisation in a sense becomes modal—it has one chord change, and that is all the notes, all the time." **ANDY HATHILLON** *Shuffle Play* *Elegies For The Recording Angel* is now out on New World. Website: [www.johnschott.com](http://www.johnschott.com)

## bitstream

Plunderphonist **John Oswald** has been toiled up in his sonic research lab for the last two years preparing his 6L track two CD set, *69 Plunderphonies 96*. Surviving his career from 1969 through 1996, it includes all 25 tracks from his notorious, banned *Plunderphone* album, plus a handbook book documenting his ideas and copyright travels.

+++ Warner Music is resuing 30 titles from the vaults of Warner Bros, Atlantic, Reprise and Elektra. In among non-essential items by The Dave Clark 5 and Sphairia are a trio of leftfield comic jazz classics. **The Herbie Hancock Sextet's** *Mondravis and Crossings* and **Alto's** *Contrails* Ultra-tire *Exotism*. Unfortunately the reappearance of these fabulous records is compromised by the fact that they have been repackage in hideous red in black digipacs. +++ 2001 marks two decades since New York Hip-hop label **Tonny Boy** gave birth to Planet Rock. After *Alvin Bamba's* first releases, *Celebrations* include reissues of albums by Bambaataa, Jovan Creek, Planet Patrol, Force MDs, Jason Latif, Digital Underground and De La Soul. Now, what about Pressure Drops' *Rock The House 7* +++ Bay Area loonies, guitarist **Buckwheat** and drummer **Brian** have shared a stage with **Axi Rose**. They completed the first new Guns N' Roses live-up in seven years, which performed a New Year's gig at Las Vegas's House of Blues. +++ **Passive Officers**' early electronic music will surface soon on a Sub Rosa CD featuring a 1959 tape work and two analogue noise works from 1964 and another on Pagan, whose second *Officers* collection covers 1962-64. The Mother of Deep Listening has also completed a DVD piece which was premiered last month at NYC's Tonic. +++ **Paul Nikolic's** *10 Records* opens a deluge of his material with *Young Person's Guide To Phil Nelson* (originally released on Blast First in 1994 as a mail order item available exclusively through The Wire, the Touch label follows with *Touchworks*). Jim O'Rourke's *Mosko* will release two takes of the New York minimalist's guitar piece, CD 44, with Lou Barlow's Thurston Moore. Rafael Toral, Kevin Drumm, Alan Licht and Robert Post Extreme has a four hour DVD in the pipeline, and upcoming on Forced Exposure is *Three Pieces For Cello*.

+++ In August 1999 **Pan Sonic** advertised in *The Wire* for promoters in out of the fly locales willing to stage dates on a Bon Joe-style world tour. Now the Finnish duo have announced an itinerary that takes in dates in Australia, New Zealand, Turkey, Israel, Serbia, Croatia, Slovakia, Hungary, Iceland, Mexico, Argentina, Malaysia and... believe it or else, Easter Island. +++ Add N To X to Barry T and All Seeing Its Dean Horner have launched the Sheffield based **Cercie Records** with singles from Fat Records' *Monsters* and *National Bireid*. +++ The other **Dead Kennedy's** have been awarded control over their back catalogue and substantial damages against *Joe's* *Alternative Territories* for the labels' "failure to promote the group". *Belfia* presents the defence on his new album, *Decade The Afro* and at [www.alternativeterritories.com](http://www.alternativeterritories.com) +++ Coming soon: *The Drive Home* a documentary of last year's **Detroit Electronic Film Festival** featuring Derrick May, Richie Hatten, Kevin Saunderson, Carl Craig, M3, Deejay Society. +++ **Zappa** comes. **Meggy Lonsdale** and **Lionel Rolfe** have new projects out. *Lionel's* new CD *Remembering The Wire*, is an album of "sublimar acid trip improvisation, while *Rolfe's* book, *Death And Redemption* in London takes in his relationship with Zappa and the author's uncle, Yehuda Menuhin. **THE WRITER**

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## Tsugaru

Communications have improved since Japan's greatest poet, Matsuo Basho, took the narrow road to the Deep North in 1689, all the way up the line recording the melancholy sound of Time passing in haki ephemeral like dew, loud as a lightning flash "Old pond! frog jumps in/round of water." Yet the Shinkansen bullet train still terrifies at Aki and the castle town of Morioka. Japan Rail's high-speed flagships might have made some advance on Basho's northernmost terminus under the shadow of the holy mountain Dewa Sanzen, but once you break with their onward express connections to the port of Aomori and the tunnel route to Hokkaido, the future shock Japan fleetingly glimpsed from the Shinkansen window timewaits into the winter-weathered backwaters of the Tohoku region. Aomori hinges together the stumpy thumb of Tsugaru peninsula, jabbing into the treacherous straits separating main island Honshu from Hokkaido, and the clawed finger of Shirokita, where the souls of dead children gather along the shores of a sulphurous lake beneath another holy mountain, Osore-Zan.

Meets hang heavy in the region's valleys and forests, and the plains between feel strangely deserted. Despite the partially successful attempts of Japan Rail to cultivate a domestic spiritual lack at the heart of contemporary society that could only be filled by a holiday quest for an older, more "authentic" Japan, it has yet to provide the rolling stock to overcome the region's remoteness. Furthermore, the native folk music is stubbornly resistant to assimilation into a more easily packaged folklore. In common with Appalachian bluegrass and the Mississippi Delta blues displaced to Chicago, the culture developed out of Tsugaru's isolation is correspondingly bonafide, robust and proud. Some of its more notable figures include the disadorned dandy writer Osamu Dazai (author of *No Longer Human*), *The Setting Sun*, and the wartime travel journal *Return To Tsugaru*, the flamboyant film maker and award-garde

theatre director Shuji Terayama (who has a wonderful Pandora's box of a museum dedicated to him in Misawa, his musical director JA Seazer's CDs are also well worth checking out), and the great, guttural singer-songwriter Ken Miki. The latter shares an occasional tour with Koji Hano called Vaga, whose first album *Tsugaru* (PSF) is a roaring evocation of the region's lingering frontier spirit that zips with electricity like the cat's cradle of cables crisscrossing its ramshackle towns. It was another, more nervous Hano association that started me on the road to Hiroaki, a castle town 30 minutes south west of Aomori. Hano makes a guest appearance on *Fortify World* (PSF), by Tsugaru shamisen player Chisato Yamada. Its beguiling fusion of shamisen—the banjo-like three string instrument common to all Japan—ghostly percussion and Hano guitar was my backfaced introduction to the folk tradition that most physically incarnates the area's character, known as "Tsugaru shamisen." In a country obsessed with ranking its cultural treasures, Yamada is acknowledged as Japan's number one Tsugaru shamisen master. Born into a farming family near Aomori in 1931, he was inspired to learn the instrument by a visit to his school of an earlier master when he was 15. In 1963 he opened the Live House Yamayuta (Mountain Song) in Hiroaki, where he has since played the music almost every night (barring tours at home and abroad) with his ensemble of apprentices and students. One of his more illustrious former students is Michio Sato, who has recorded two albums on PSF, plus albums of duets with John Zorn (*Goryu Island on Taido*) and a cast of NYC downtown avantists (*Adon on Hat Hut*).

As folk traditions go, Tsugaru shamisen is remarkably open to other musics, perhaps because it is also a relatively recent development, the instrument's identifying characteristics—a sturdier body with a thicker neck to withstand the more punishing attack of the larger comb-like *bachi* (handaxe pick) required by its playing styles—were first documented in the middle of the 19th century. Predominantly unnotated, its early practitioners were largely itinerant blind street musicians

who passed the tradition down as they trudged from town to town. Like most Japanese crafts, shamisen apprenticeship is based on painstaking observation, copying the master and getting the posture right. Eventually an individual voice develops out of the language passed down through generations. This is the tradition simultaneously adhered to and advanced, ever the same yet always evolving. Yamada's Yamayuta ensemble of between eight and ten men and women, ranging in age between 20 and 60, split their duties between working the bar, serving food and taking the stage in various solo, duo and larger configurations introduced by Yamada himself or his groomed successor, the benign Kazuo Shibata, the music's appeal is as immediate as any robust folk tradition, and it really comes into its own in performance. The truly



The master: Chisato Yamada and pupils at Live House Yamayuta

strung strings, requiring constant retuning, resonate louder and deeper live, and the *bachi* comes down that much harder on the shamisen's body, so that each struck note is closely shadowed by a heavy clacking beat, while the left hand stops, plucks, bends and wrings melodies up and down its neck.

The blues/bluegrass comparisons only stretch so far, but Tsugaru shamisen shares with the former the capacity to transform harsh lives into resonances, release and celebration through the agency of song. Unleashed by Yamada's shamisen, Ritsa Hukushi unleashes keening, melismatic ectoplasms of word notes, her voice a medium for the region's centuries of hardship and heartbreak. In common with bluegrass, Yamada's players are inquisitive improvisors out of familiar or traditional themes, their chops similarly honed in friendly duets with their partners. Nights at Yamayuta can get as rowdy as a saloon bar hoedown in a Western cattle town on payday, the audience responding with whoops to the music's beat repetitions and irregularities, ragtime breaks and embellishments. And there's no (un)imposed! Nor more exhilarating than the sound of Yamada or Shibata leading eight to ten players through thundering ensemble pieces, flooding the room with highly reverberating strings and rattling *bachi* beats. **BIRA KOFFI** Live House Yamayuta [www.07-u-page-so-net.net/eng/37shuiken/yamayuta.html](http://www.07-u-page-so-net.net/eng/37shuiken/yamayuta.html)

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# GO TO COMMERCIAL

From the early 'Audio Logos' of Raymond Scott to The Jacksons getting burned by Pepsi-Cola, **music and adverts** have always experienced an uneasy relationship. Words: Ken Hollings

John Cage's lecture "Indeterminacy: New Aspect Of Form In Instrumental And Electronic Music," first delivered at the Brussels World Fair in 1958, contains an account of his brief flirtation with the J. Walter Thompson Company, one of America's leading advertising agencies. "Mr. Cage, are you willing to prostitute your art?" the composer was asked during the course of a preliminary phone call. "Yes," Cage said. A meeting was subsequently arranged at which he was to present their executives with some samples of his work for percussion. "After hearing a few recordings," Cage recalls, "one of the directors said to me, 'Wait a minute.' Then seven directors formed what looked like a football huddle. From this they finally emerged, came over to me, and said, 'You're too good for us. We're going to save you for *Robinson Crusoe*.'" The incident reveals less about aesthetic differences than it does the prevailing technological mood. Marshall McLuhan's iconoclastic study of pop culture's communication strategies, *The Mechanical Bride*, had been in print since 1951. By 1955, Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg, two of Cage's closest collaborators, were accepting commissions to design window displays for Tiffany's and Bonwit Teller, where Andy Warhol's early paintings would also be displayed as a background to the spring fashions of 1961. A radical shift in the relationship between art and its context had occurred. The expanding multi-model universe explored in McLuhan's book required pop forms and pop technologies in order to exist publicly

Without them, Cage was stuck on the 18th century equivalent of Gilgai's Island.

## A shocking flexibility

Programming electronic equipment with the 4 Cheng is one thing; getting it to come up with a 30 second jingle for Hostess Twinkies quite another. Modern advertising, as exemplified by the flashing, unlimited cosmos of the TV commercial, has had a profound influence on how music is consumed in society. The defining moment in the history of this relationship may well have been when Raymond Scott bought an army surplus tape recorder on Canal Street in Manhattan at the close of World War II, before commercial models were readily available. The machine could only record for one minute, but to a composer already skilled in writing radio jingles, editing his music on acetate discs and releasing it on 78 rpm records, this limitation was anything but a problem. In mass media ad campaigns, time really is money.

It's also a mode of perception. Responses to extreme stimuli, however loud or bright, deaden quickly, so a regime of high velocity, high contrast change is required to retain people's attention. A civilization built entirely upon novelties came into existence overnight. Scott, a restless musical experimenter, was ready for it. A division of Raymond Scott Enterprises Inc., Manhattan Research Inc. was established in 1946 for the commercial exploitation of electronic sound in the

creation of zippy little soundtracks for TV ads. Central to this was Scott's notion of the 'Audio Logo': brief, heavily accented bursts of electronically generated sound intended to cut through TV viewers' apathy and "grab em by the ears." Such bright, daring slivers of noise, Scott soon discovered, had the ability to fit in anywhere, indicating that "electronic music for this purpose may turn out to have unusual vitality, conviction and atmosphere plus a rather shocking flexibility." A typical example can be heard in Scott's accompaniment to a 1960 Vim commercial, created to "reflect the atmosphere of their scientific resources, but most of all had to have the feeling of sparkling white." The resulting mix of sounds and music was an overt advertisement for itself: progress as its own best product. Scott followed it up with ads for Sante, Vicks' Medicated Cough Drops, Buffum and Ausloite sparkplugs.

Around the same time, Eric Sidel was using eight-track 35mm sprocket tape to create electronic sounds for TV and radio spots. "If you listened to the radio around the early 1960s, you would hear an American Express commercial or a Maxwell House Perking Coffee Pot commercial," Bob Moog observed, "and back then all of these were a part of everybody's listening experience." Responsible for the five second CBS sound logo, Sidel helped introduce electronic music to the listening public as part of the background chatter to modern life, along with library music, movie soundtracks and TV signature tunes. Bob Moog, having sold theremin kits through the pages of *electronics*





magazines, now found he had a growing market for his modular synthesizer. By decade's end MiniMoog pioneer Dave Vanover was being sponsored to promote the new technology in Taco Bell restaurants.

### Modish chic! Modish chic!

Life is short, a pop 45 shorter still, but a TV commercial is the shortest of them all. Its message has to hit and you go, then move on and do it all over again. "Go to commercial," is as much a statement of extreme mobility and media velocity as it is a studio directive. The evolution of the teenage mass consumer into the 1970s meant that modes of expression had to change with it. Youth represented an ideological expression of the world that, like Raymond Scott's Audio Logos, accented whatever it brushed up against. It's therefore not surprising that after President Kennedy declared himself a Berliner in the shadow of the Berlin Wall, German commercial interests should identify themselves with American pop culture. As Crippled Dick's recent *Popshopping* compilation demonstrates, rock beats, psychedelic blues and brassy movie themes not only shifted product but also allied it to a free-market concept of existence, one that could be broadcast directly into the Eastern Bloc.

Back in the West, composers such as Alan Hawkshaw were appropriating the same cool modes to sell overheated notions of what was in ad-speak terms, "sexy." Hawkshaw was responsible for recording "The Night Rider," the tune famous for accompanying the exploits of a mysterious black-Gad figure who, instead of spying on the Russians or murdering Hollywood movie stars in their sleep, secretly delivered boxes of Cadbury's Milk Tray chocolates to a woman with a fairly relaxed attitude toward being stalked on a regular basis. There's little to separate the catchy terrace rhythms of Hawkshaw's 1972 "It's All At The Go-Go Now!" and The Wolf Gabbie Orchestra's frenzied dance party "Swinging Nordwest," created for a German shoe manufacturer in 1965. A female chorus chants, "Modish chic! Modish chic!" near the composer's start with the joyful conviction of students attending a political rally. Well, if

you're not going to get passionate about fashion footwear, what are you going for yourself over? By 1974 Danny Wright And The Hustlers brought the whole thing together with the choreographed abandon of "Shout About Peeps." A danceable solution to teenage revolution had arrived.

### Loving what you do

25 January 1984. The Jacksons are recording an expensive TV slot for Pepsi, sponsors to the tune of five million dollars of their forthcoming Victory Tour, at the Los Angeles Shrine Auditorium. "You're a whole new generation!" Michael Jackson sings along to "Billie Jean", one of his biggest hits. "You're loving what you do!" Seconds later Michael Jackson's hair is on fire, set alight by a magnesium flash bomb, and the largest endorsement deal in Madison Avenue history nearly goes up in smoke. Jackson, who had already declared that he "didn't believe in Pepsi" or "drink that crap", threatened to release tapes to the media of his head haloed in flames. Pepsi settled for \$1.5 million, which went to fund a hospital burns unit that subsequently closed down. In the meantime, Paul McCartney showed Jackson how to make much easier money out of TV commercials by buying up catalogues of existing songs and licensing them to production companies. McCartney had already put Buddy Holly to work in his fashion. It was like buying into a dream, acknowledging a wise and common currency of shared expectations with the record-buying public. Michael Jackson repaid McCartney's advice that year by plunking down \$47.5 million for the entire Northern Songs back catalogue, including many of The Beatles' most famous numbers. As a result, Nike got the use of "Revolution", Panasonic secured "All You Need Is Love" and Sunshine Bakeries used "Good Day Sunshine". So many memories.

By the 1990s, it had become common to see Miles Davis pushing Apple computers, Hendrix doing the wild thing over Wrangler Jeans, and The Clash getting stropic with Levis 501s. Defiant poses and product placements went hand in hand. With The VU's "Venus In Furs" put to work flagging Pirelli car tyres, however, the collective

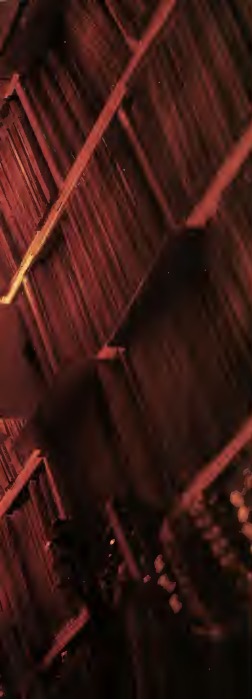


experience had become a ruptured intimacy. Listening to an album is a highly controlled, personal activity; you decide what your favourite performers do and when. The moment they turn round and try to sell you a BMW, that illusion is over. Today, when a musician like Moby turns down an advertiser's request to use one of his songs, it makes the headlines.

And there's such a thing as bad publicity. After Michael Jackson broke down on the Asian leg of his *Dangerous* tour in Bangkok, suffering from what his doctors claimed was dehydration, Pepsi-Cola contemplated how they might cancel their multi-million dollar relationship with the superstar for fear the company might get caught up in the allegations of child abuse flying around back home in the States. Local Coca-Cola bottlers in Thailand saw a great commercial opportunity. They began running ads in the national newspapers that simply read "Dehydrated? There's always Coke." Raymond Scott's Manhattan Research Inc. is out now on Bista; for more information, go to [www.raymondscott.com](http://www.raymondscott.com). The *Popshopping* compilation is available on Crippled Dick.

A man with dark hair, wearing a dark jacket, is shown in profile, looking towards the right. He is in a dimly lit room with a warm, orange glow. In the background, there is a large, stylized face sculpture with a wide mouth and a small nose. The text "voices from a gone world" is overlaid in white, bold, sans-serif font across the middle of the image.

**voices from a gone world**



Encompassing a radio show, a Website and a series of historical ethnic music CDs, the **Secret Museum Of Mankind** preserves and materialises the exotic sound relics of an antique world unrecognisable today. In New York, Richard Henderson meets the Museum's curator, Pat Conte. Photos: Kareem Black

In his 1995 book, *Mr Wilson's Cabinet Of Wonders*, writer Lawrence Weschler mentions the term by which the first museums of the 16th and 17th centuries were known: *wunderkammern*, or wonder-cabinets. These early institutions earned the designation by presenting natural marvels side by side with those wrought by man, preferably with the greatest variety of each. Their intention, ultimately, was to reintegrate a sense of wonder within the lives of their patrons.

Sadly, such collections have all but disappeared. In the present day, museums are curated by academics and promoters, their contents streamlined and specified. Weschler cites the quixotic collection of Los Angeles's Museum of Jurassic Technology as the sole contemporary link to the *wunderkammern* of yore, but another storehouse of arcane objects and sounds — the Secret Museum Of Mankind — would seem to fit the bill as well. This museum has its physical component: a house in Long Island, New York filled with vintage musical instruments, records and books. The other two faces of its tripartite identity (a radio programme and an ongoing series of compact discs put out by the longstanding American preservationist label Yazoo) are invisible in the conventional sense but are more immediately accessible for being so. Like the music collected on the Secret Museum CDs, the facility itself is rooted in a past distant and dimly imagined, but is filled with performances and musical theory as impassioned as rock and as rigorous as minimalist music. In this regard, the Secret Museum would appear postmodern and then some.

*"But outside is the eternal Listen"* \* Pat Conte at the Secret Museum, 1995

The Secret Museum's curator is a 44-year-old postal worker named Pat Conte. It is in the basement of his home that the extraordinary cache of musical arcana resides. The basement also holds his studio, where his weekly broadcasts, also known as *The Secret Museum Of Mankind*, originate. The physical collection of stringed instruments and musicology texts has been amassed since Conte's youth; the Secret Museum radio programme has been on the air for ten years. The latter began as a special broadcast commemorating the anniversary of the atom bomb dropped on Hiroshima with a three-hour special on Japanese music, first airing in 1990. Conte's programme was sufficiently successful that it became a regular component of the radical Manhattan FM station WBAL, running bi-monthly and eventually on a weekly basis.

The Museum, initially on air and then on disc since the mid-90s, was dedicated to

preserving and disseminating music from the dawn of phonography, a time when 'aural oddities' were recorded and preserved on 78rpm discs. These sounds, collected from the four corners of the globe, were preserved with something less than altruistic intentions. Records, at the start of the past century, were often loss leaders, designed to lure customers intrigued by the newly invented gramophone into buying one of the early record players. These recordings may now be recognised as the greatest and most diverse array of pre-mass media World Music that we are likely to experience in the present day.

Not long after the on-air debut of the *Secret Museum*, Conte had a fateful encounter with another vintage music expert and enthusiast, Richard Nevins. The two men had known one another through record collecting circles for nearly three decades by Nevins's estimation. President of the venerable reissue imprint Yazoo, Nevins shared Conte's obsession with performances of the past, as preserved on shellac discs and cylinders. Conte is quick to point out that, by blues collecting



standards, "I was way down there on the food chain, merely plankton to Nevins's larger mammal." When first discussing the prospect of *Secret Museum* releases with Nevins in the early 90s, Conte insisted that the Museum's exotic sounds and audio relics were of equal importance with the vintage musical Americana already reissued by Yazoo. Once the validity of his project was agreed upon, Conte recalls, "We sort of changed the focus to not make it a scholarly kind of formal atlas. Rather, we would start off with a 'tobby' to the *Secret Museum*, which became those first live volumes, issued concurrently with regional collections."

A regional collection, *The Music Of Madagascar: Classic Traditional Recordings Of The 1930s*, was the debut *Secret Museum* CD (albeit without the *Secret Museum* brand), released on Yazoo. In its booklet, Conte wrote of the composer Henry Cowell assembling an album of 'antique ethnic music for Moe Asch, founder of Folkways Records. Among the more commercialised forms of World Music in that 1950 collection (*Music Of One World*, later retitled *Music Of The World's Peoples*), Cowell included a mysterious vocal piece by a Malagasy female chorus, an example of the island's previously unheard mpilao music. Cowell's musical altruism set a precedent, amplified a half century later by Pat Conte's 1995 Madagascar anthology and then

by the omnibus compilations bearing the *Secret Museum Of Marland* imprint which followed soon afterwards. Other regional survey CDs issued subsequently under the *Secret Museum*'s banner have been devoted to early recordings from Central Asia and both North and East Africa.

"When I started collecting 78s seriously," Pat Conte recalls, "I was interested in blues and hillbilly music, as that was the music that I played. It was really too late, as by the 1970s it really wasn't the time to find records like that easily, especially up north. But it was the tail end of availability of the remnants of this whole ethnic library that the same labels the major labels had issued during the same era. New York was certainly a good place to find that music. Essentially, when I started looking for the blues material, I was putting aside these foreign records, being totally intimidated or almost apathetic about them. I was looking for the wrong thing in the right place. Until my curiosity got the better of me and I thought, 'What is this stuff? Who are these Chinese and Turkish musicians? What are these records about?'"

*"Blessings on the phonograph! How otherwise can we hear music of other civilisations than our own?" — Aaron Copland*

Conte was drawn to vintage examples of recorded ethnic music in much the same way as European composers, nearly a century before, were hoarding World Music for the first time via the recently arrived phonograph. Sate, Debussy, Ravel, Messiaen all were exposed to Malagasy harp players and Indonesian gamelan orchestras. Musicians from European colonies were imported to capital cities on the continent, as it was often easier to transport music makers than the bulky technology required for music recording. Conte notes that ethnologists of the day were recording with portable equipment, though these were the exception in the case of most commercial recordings of the time. "In America, big companies with expensive equipment could create, in effect, a studio in somebody's drugstore or furniture store or a church, so the sound quality is OK, if not optimum."

The *Secret Museum Of Marland*, on disc, centres on a period stretching from 1925 to 1948, the beginnings of which in the 20s are described by Conte as being "the most marvellous decade of recorded music," when "an uncanny savvy for preservation, accidental or not, became almost commonplace." It would not last. With a wry tone typical of his personal approach to annotation, Conte observes, "This was far from being a beacon for the [recording] industry in years to come. There's a renaissance in all kinds of exotic music, but it's not being done by major labels fishing for customers, as was the case in the early days. The industry press at the time wrote about [the variety of music offered] as a means to selling more [record playing] machines. What better way to sell players to recent immigrants to America than to have music of the old country for your customers?" Did the recordists at the beginning of the 20th century gather World Music more selectively? "I'm not sure of that," opines Conte, citing research done by English historian and fado music expert Paul Vernon. "There's correspondence preserved from the early days of the Gramophone Company, from England, which had offices in all of the major cities and in the Far East and Africa. They have letters from their field representatives requesting bargains full of equipment and blank discs, these guys were out there to [record] as much as they could, just to get it cut, ship it back and sort it out later."

*"We may, reasoning by analogy, find in what state music existed when our own ancestors were in a state of nature." — Louis Elson*

"As any collector will tell you, every record has its story," observes Conte. The *Secret Museum* discs tell dozens of those stories as they describe a dizzying tour of a world map unrecognisable today. On Volume Three, clarinet playing as vivacious as a sperm's tail comes out of the past from Epirus, in Greece, courtesy of a departed master named Halkas. "The name Halkas is synonymous with that style, that really syrupy clarinet, with its vivacious, excessive ornamentation and broad dynamic range. That's from way over in the Western part of Greece, near the Albanian border. The Albanian clarinet playing drifted into Greece. The first 78 disc of Greek music that I acquired was a clarinet piece, also from Epirus, from about the same time and I was knocked out by the sound. Pulling in two directions, [the Epirotic clarinet style] is a

Pat Costa broadcasts the *Secret Museum* radio show from the Long Island basement which houses his collection



very heavy sound, yet somehow it has that hopeful quality to it."

The second volume contains an ecstatic bhajan rendition by Indian virtuoso Prof. Narayanrao Vyas. Conte marvels at what it took to capture the merest essence of a raga within the two brief sides of an early recording, noting the seamless transition from one side to the other. "It's a real mark of artistry, in that there had to have been a break in activity in order for the engineers to get the next plate ready to record on, etcetera, and still the musician jumps right back into the feeling of the performance recorded for the first side. It's always a miracle, as three minutes is nothing in terms of so much non-Western music. It could be the use of slences or the heavy repetition required for a ritual piece, that have to be somehow brought forward in this snapshot. It doesn't happen as often as you'd like, but when it does, it's outstanding. If it was an oud player involved in an improvisation, the music is structured to have slences that are a very deep part of the music. How many slences can you have within three minutes?"

*"Sometimes he bent over the whirling, pulsating mechanism as over a spray of lilac, wrept in a cloud of sweet sound."* — Thomas Mann

Conte's first encounter with 78rpm discs came with exposure to Italian music in his parents' home. "A novelty, a bit embarrassing [laughs]. I was fascinated by my father's wind-up Victrola in the basement and being able to play with this contraption, a totally mechanical device that produced music, this was endlessly fun. There was no electricity involved, the music was literally being scraped off of a groove. It was always amazing to me. My grandmother provided informative commentary."

Soon, Italian discs filtered onto the young collector's record shelf. "I kept them with my novelty records. Any Italian records would have been next to Spike Jones! They were just weird. One that I laughed at initially was an Italian bagpipe record, which I heard when I was 12. I just thought this was the strangest thing. My grandmother told me that it was Christmas music, which she'd remembered from her youth. That really stuck with me. Afterward I'd notice that, in the Italian nativity figurines, among the shepherds there was a bagpiper."

*"The Chinese scale, take it which way we will, is certainly very Scottish."* — Chas. Burney, 1789

Astounded at the presence of bagpipes in another country, Conte would later learn of Turkish bagpipes. "There's something going on. I knew there were guitars and fiddles in many lands, but hadn't suspected universality in bagpipes. That became a sub-genre to collect. I was looking for any kind of piping. In New York, you could still find remnants of recordings by some of the greatest pipes anywhere. About the same time I heard Patsy Touhey, one of the greatest Irish pipes, who probably died before the advent of electric recording [he actually lived 1865-1923]. He made maybe three sides, but these represented the highest virtuosity imaginable, just breathtaking playing. It was so different from Scottish war pipes that it beckoned me to search out more music like that. Touhey's was a very antique sound by American tastes, and as such there was little music like it to be found in my area, but in Ireland and the British Isles in general, this appeared to be an ongoing tradition. I found imported records from the 30s, the 40s and the 50s when amazing Uilleann pipes were still being recorded. Touhey had a unique spot within the history of that instrument, a tremendous early player. His sides were the definition of a classic performance."

*"Primitive music is really not so primitive. It is ancient, and therefore sophisticated."* — Carlos Chavez

Drones began to fascinate Conte, especially as a component of fiddle music. "Anybody who would change a fiddle tuning, in hillbilly music, to get some kind of drone going was always another source of fascination. Contemporary with Patsy Touhey's career was Eck Robertson from Amarillo, Texas, whose hillbilly solo fiddle record ("Sally Gooden") I found as a teenager. He came to New York in 1922, which was either at the time that Touhey was recording or shortly thereafter. Both men

recorded for the same label, Victor. Again, you have this incredible showpiece of solo fiddling, full of drones. It was one of the records that, in the early days of marketing, would be a freebie, a sample disc that would come with a new record player. It was a mountain music novelty, but it's being played by the Texas state fiddle champion and it, too, has this air of unselfishness in his approach, the playing is so remarkable."

*"The instruments are perishable."* — Al. Kroeber

Conte describes the growth and subsequent diversity of the Secret Museum as "a very natural progression for me. I really immersed myself in creating a music library via records and thousands of hours of tape garnered from other collections. From there, I built my own library of reference books, these ranged from books on exploration and travel to formal ethnomusicology. After doing that for a number of years, I started getting interested in the instruments themselves, collecting many hundreds of the actual instruments, especially the stringed instruments."

"Now I've been dabbling in research as to the history and evolution of the actual instruments themselves," he continues. "String gauges and tunings, how to set them up and then [laughs] learning how to make funny sounds on them. When I'm trying to learn the kora, it's a little bit of a struggle as I don't have a teacher or anything. I do have the benefit of knowing several great players, though. It feels very comfortable to sit around and try to figure out these things."

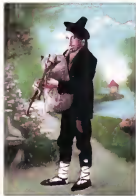
As a performer, Conte is well steeped in American roots music, a recent profile on the Secret Museum's director, commissioned by an American television network, opened with a clip of Conte playing acoustic guitar, seated at the wheel of his car during a lunch break at the post office. Also shown was Conte's string outfit. The Canebreak Rattlers ("a hillbilly band, the same guys who've been together for 25 years"), who recorded in the late '70s and the '80s for, variously, Flying Crow, Cinamon and Merrimack. Conte also has played in a blues group, The Old Brothers ("real hard Country blues and pre-blues, we played electric too").

Ironically, his blues background facilitated one of his most transporting World Music experiences. Conte had been working as a volunteer for the National Folk Festival held in Lowell, Massachusetts in 1990. Participating in the festival was a Tuwan throat singer, en route to the Smithsonian Institute in Washington to record. "The Tuwan was sort of my responsibility," Conte recalls, "tending to his off-hours, getting him on stage on time, that sort of thing. We had to seize a brief window of opportunity before he left for Washington." So it was that Conte, playing a National steel guitar, accompanied the throat singer during an impromptu set in a local restaurant, a film of which resides in the Secret Museum's archives. "The [National] guitar I was playing was a tri-piano, a very sexy guitar. The Tuwan regarded it as a sacred object, a magical object made out of silver. He was in full costume. It was staggering to watch."

*"The sensations and ideas thus excited in us by music... appear from their vagueness, yet depth, like mental reverberations to the emotions and thoughts of a long-past age."* — Charles Darwin

Common to all eras in the Secret Museum Of Mankind is a sense that one is glimpsing snapshots of an extinct performance sensibility, not heard in modern recordings. In Pat Conte's words, "You have this limitation of three minutes per side, and there's a champion musician who's forced to imbue through this strange new technology within that time frame. Add to that the fact of their being acoustically recorded, playing into a horn, before there were microphones. What comes across is the legacy of people born in another century, who learned their music not from records or radio. There's a desperation to it, but it does represent a window to another time." Conte often refers to the "Time tunnel of the recording horn" as affording modern listeners a window onto a "gone world."

"Currently, with CDs and digital recording, we're in a comparable period to the time of these first recordings. It was new technology then and the parallels are many. In the case of Touhey, for instance, his playing was renowned and he was a musical hold-out in many ways — he even resisted it as it was still 1790! At the same time, he was using the home media to promote his playing, especially as a teacher. Touhey offered lessons on home-recorded cylinders, like cassettes or CD burners that are ubiquitous



Clockwise from top left: label artwork for Spanish Victor's guitar manufacturing arms (1938); three Columbia Records catalogues: New Zealand (1925); Scandinavia (c.1920) and Turkey (1920); Cuban fiddle player (c.1860); Chinese drum skin (c.1920); Calabrian paper (1919); piano roll brochure (1920)



## Richard Henderson picks five highlights of Yazoo's *Secret Museum* CD series

**The Music Of Madagascar** Classic Traditional Recordings Of The 1930s (vzoo 7001) CD

Though not ostensibly branded as a *Secret Museum* collection, this regional anthology of Malagasy music from the early 20th century was an inspired start for the series. The national instrument of the island of Gypsies, the *lulala* (often known as the *valina*) is very much in evidence, as are the quavering adult-child voices much loved by fans of this implausible music. Annotations by Pat Conte establish the educative yet slyly ironic tone that is his curatorial fingerprint. Style mavens take note: An impossibly cool two-panel *sipao* photo says it all about Madagascar musicians: aimless and impeccable fashion sense.

**The Secret Museum Of Mankand Vol 1** Ethnic Music Classics 1925-1948 (vzoo 7004) CD

The premier global omnibus from the

*Museum*, a walk around the lobby of Mr Conte's cabinet of wonders. Consistent features of the series already in place include the Nicolas Sternsky-like page of music-oriented quotations, a Bartlett's for the phonographically obsessed. Some of the most memorable performances from the Conte archives are to be heard here: Japan's Imperial Household Orchestra, a rare example of Jamaican calypso from Lord Composer and a *Soprintendente* Mutamoras cut which shows why Cuban music was able to conquer mid-century Africa. The programmatic title of the first track, by Nigeria's Eboja Chor, sets the tone "Jubilee Anthem".

**The Secret Museum Of Mankand Vol 4** Ethnic Music Classics 1925-1948 (vzoo 7010) CD

This instalment contains less island music, but the emphasis on the evanescent nature of traditional forms in the early century is kind

of heartbreaking. Starting off with an outdoor recording of Swedish clogging (transferred to the disc cutter at the time by phone lines — pre-DSU!), the two dozen selections include relentlessly engaging sounds from, among others, Quebec, Vera Cruz, Brazil, Kuwait and Nepal. An extraordinary unrecorded dance piece by Romany musicians of the Cagan Group will have you renting all three films of Tony Gold's gypsy trilogy. And, of course, there are even more cool photos of musicians from Madagascar.

**The Secret Museum Of Mankand Ethnic Music Classics 1925-1948/Music Of East Africa** (vzoo 7015) CD

The roots of up-country dry guitar from Kenya and evidence of 'insurrection in song' from Mozambique, where Francis Balygo managed to circumvent the attempts of Jesuit missionaries to stamp out anything that sounded like fun. Swahili lullabies from Dar Es Salaam dovetail with march songs from Uganda. More thoughts on the nature and motivation of the engineers/pioneers who lugged blank cylinders and recording gear to

Mombasa (Of early efforts to repack these discs for foreign markets, Conte notes: "A 'race record' mentality didn't seem to flourish well outside of America.") Engaging stuff from a large portion of the African continent still under-recorded, even now.

**The Secret Museum Of Mankand Ethnic Music Classics 1925-1948/Central Asia** (vzoo 7015) CD

To hear the great Nagajewa give a heroic performance on the *dombire* (an archaic antelope horn of the Balakhal) is to know, for the few minutes of this performance, how the world looks through the eyes of a highly evolved being. Another *utensio* found here: Khan Shushenka possessed a coloratura voice of impossible flexibility, a reminder of the disposability of most contemporary media-music experiences. A wealth of weird and wonderful stuff fills out the volume: stonemason voice making! Turkish *dutar* instrumentals, the bellows shake of the dry-tuned 100-button accordion known as the *baglam*, and much more evidence of the musical renaissance engendered in the former Soviet Union prior to 1950.



ending. He was using homemade technology to make his living, supplementing whatever he could make from recording for a label."

Of the curatorial style that has informed each *Secret Museum* CD, Conte demurs, saying, "There's not much organising [laughs]. I work from a desire to put forth sounds that are moving and that speak universally, as much as the music that I love to play. My selections are not representative of recognised maxima in whatever music they're drawn from. My desire is to find something unusual enough to just reach out and grab listeners as they first grabbed me, and purely for listening."

"I don't present them in a scholarly way. I don't think that. I intellectualise over the notes that much. I've annoyed countless scholars and discographers everywhere because of including records that don't fall strictly within the dates posted on the CD covers (1925-48). I've always countered with the obvious retort, 'Well, what about the music?' My object was always to get this great body of music out there that I thought was unknown and secret. It wasn't long before it wasn't secret or unknown."

*"Do you know how to clean sounds? It's a rather dirty business. Sorting them is neater!"*  
Erik Satie

Discussing the state of the art in digital sound restoration, Pat Conte cites some of his favourite titles: restored recordings issued by European labels (Archives De La Musique Arabe, issued in the late 80s by Radio France's Ocora label, among these). But then, his voice takes on a sceptical cast as he notes, "The Europeans are very enamoured with the digital realm, cleaning up the sound of old recordings by playing with lots of knobs [Secret Museum remastering engineer] Richard Nevins's remastering is done with: Old World care. He's someone who really has a musician's sensibility and his restoration of the music is done in a much different way with a lot of careful listening. There's not a lot of dial twisting compared to people who put things through digital processors. Nevins is one of the unsung heroes in the preservation both of early American music and now, with the Secret Museum series, of early World Music as well." Ever the blues enthusiast, Conte points to Nevins's reclaiming the musical content of recordings by Blind Lemon Jefferson as the *ne plus ultra* of the craft: "Jefferson's career was characterised by great guitar playing and lousy recordings. Finally after all these years Nevins has freed that."

Richard Nevins himself defines his engineering efforts at the Museum as the ability to "strike a balance between the aesthetic of sounding good and getting rid of as much noise as possible, though some will always be there." He ruefully notes the limited sales of the eight CDs, knowing full well that only those "with open minds and open ears" are

likely to be enticed through the Secret Museum's virtual portals. Nevins makes a parallel between the delayed impact of Harry Smith's 1952 *Anthology Of American Folk Music* (see *The Wire* 196) and Pat Conte's branchchild. Of Smith's influential compilations, he comments, "The first ten years, nobody knew it existed, then it started to bubble and a lot of people looked onto it. Only a handful of people were aware of [Smith's *Anthology*] in the 50s. I think the Secret Museum represents the direct analogy of those records, as concerns ethnic music. This hasn't had that kind of time elapse as yet, that, and it is a much more eclectic series. It was much easier for listeners to relate to Harry Smith's collection of rural music from the US, whereas many of the Secret Museum's cuts are entirely more foreign to the American ear, so it's more of a challenge. Some of the greatest music ever recorded is on those discs, it's mind-boggling stuff! The problem is that it's only accessible to a limited number of people."

*"When people quit playing it, it is gone!"* — Paul Bowles

Pat Conte continues to shoulder the archival imperative according to his own deeply felt motivations. The radio arm of the Secret Museum Of Mankind has relocated to WFUM-FM, a bastion of radiophonic iconoclasm located in East Orange, New Jersey. Its broadcasts, edited and abetted by the mysterious Cezayirli Kalka, aka Richard Schuberg ("He makes the show breathe", in Conte's estimation), now can be heard worldwide via the Internet on [www.wfum.org](http://www.wfum.org). Conte hopes to syndicate the radio show within the coming year. "It's very time consuming," he explains, with a nod to his 20 years' work at the post office. "I don't do this full time."

Despite the fact that there hasn't been a compact disc bearing the Museum's imprimatur for several seasons, happily Pat Conte has begun developing a new Secret Museum Of Mankind collection. The next instalment in the project will be a two disc set comprising archival recordings of sacred music from around the world. Envisioned as a supplement to the original five volumes, the project has been in the works for a couple of years with no targeted release date in sight. "When you're in the realm of religious performances," notes Conte, "it's hard to contextualise all of them and still write a booklet essay that won't sound ridiculous. It's not like I can actually pretend to understand all the content of sacred singing from as many cultures as I can come up with. There will be mythic songs drawn from what were called 'pagan' religions, as well as music from all the recognised core religions of the world. They're all going to be mixed together. It's going to be tough to come up with the quotes for that one." ... The Secret Museum Of Mankind CD series is available through Yazoo, a division of Shanachie Records. Pat Conte's Website: [www.secretmuseum.net](http://www.secretmuseum.net)



**LEO RECORDS**Music for the inquiring mind  
and the passionate heart**GOLDEN YEARS OF NEW JAZZ**  
**NEW RELEASES JANUARY 2001****GY 9/10 FAMOUODOU DON MOYE / JOHN TCHICAI / HARTMUT GEERKEN**  
**THE AFRICAN TAPES**

Original double LP released by "Prais" label in 1987. However, the double CD comes to you with 8 bonus tracks (about one hour of previously unused music). Notes by Sigrid Hauff and annotations by Hartmut Geerken present a vivid addition to this exciting tour of 1985 during which the three Westermers jammed with African musicians in Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia.

**GY 11/12 MARILYN CRISPELL**  
**SELECTED WORKS 1983-1986 solo, duo, quartet**

This full-bodied double CD (total duration two hours and fifteen minutes) represents the three LPs released by Leo Records in 1983-86. *Rhythms Hung in Undrawn Sky* (solo), *And Your Ivory Voice Sings* (duo with Doug James), *Quartet Improvisations*, Paris 1986 (with Marcio Mattos, Didier Petit and Yvoni Minemacher). All three recordings were unavailable for many years. No doubt they will delight Marilyn's fans.

**GY 13 THE GANELIN TRIO**  
**STRICTLY FOR OUR FRIENDS**

Re-issue of the LP released in 1984. This CD fills an important gap in the discography of the Trio. Now you have three successive concerts of the Trio recorded in February (Poco-A-Poco, CD LR 101), March (*Strictly For Our Friends*, GY 13), and June (Con Fuoco, Encores, CD LR 105) of 1978. They give an idea of a tremendous output of the Trio whose music sounds as fresh as if it's been recorded to-day.

**GY 14 SERGEY KURYOKHIN**  
**THE WAYS OF FREEDOM**

Original LP released in 1981 with the same title created an uproar and controversy both inside and outside of the Soviet Union. Reissued with three bonus tracks from the same recording session. In his notes, Alex Ken paints a breathtaking picture of how the tape was recorded and smuggled out of the USSR and what happened to Kuryokhin after the release of the LP in the West.

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# standard bearers

Never ones to turn turtle before a challenge, Chicago's **Tortoise** once again upturn expectations with an explosive fourth album, *Standards*, which comes draped in a desecrated US flag. David Keenan untangles their complex genealogy to reveal the hardcore roots of a group who were always ill at ease under post-rock's apolitical banner. Photos: Frank Bauer

Tortoise in Chicago, December 2000. Left to right: Jeff Parker, Doug McCune, Johnny Merndon, John McEnroe, Dan Bitney.



**D**ecember in Chicago and the whole city seems to be asleep, buried under snow. The traffic on Milwaukee forms a slow procession, as if somewhere a phantom string section is orchestrating their glide. Passers-by have frosted eyebrows and ice-matted hair, like they've just survived a Himalayan plane crash, and it's so cold it physically hurts. Yet there's something almost fairytale about the whole scene and in the sad light of early evening, Chicago looks something like a Never Never Land, a million miles from the harsh realpolitik of George W. Bush's America — a mythic Bedford Falls full of peaceful pre-Christmas joy. Only one thing disturbs the eerie still of the street — Tortoise's Dan Bitney. "Pump it up," he belches. "It's fucking go!"

We're snowed in at Ear Wax, a hipster cafe and video rental in the cosily bohemian environs of the city's Wicker Park area and Bitney is laughing his ass off at, well, anything. Inevitably we're talking about the farce of the American election, caught as we are in the dazed wake of Bush's presidential confirmation. "Things can only get wadder," he bursts. "I know that — it's only gonna multiply! To be honest I'm at a point where if people bring up the election I'm like, 'I'm gonna sit over here — I don't wanna hear about it!' And you know what? That's how they planned it. People just got so sick of it that when they finally made a decision — a prophetic one — everyone was like, 'Don't protest! You're going against the Supreme Court! The foundation of our great democracy!' Unfortunately, I fall into that myself, I'm like, 'OK, at least it's over!'"

It's hard to give a shit these days. Yet Standards, the new Tortoise album, is the closest that this notoriously reticent and — if you believe their press — apolitical/apathetic group have ever come to an overt statement of [dis]content. From the first raging notes of "Seneca," a sky-splitting paean to the free blues of guitarist Sonny Sharrock, it's clear that this time round they've got something to say. They've never sounded quite so iconoclastic, so perilously posed as when, crouched beneath John McEnire's percussive blanket bombing, Doug McCormick wrenches earthily satisfying notes from a blazing six-string with all the hope and glory of The Band Of Gypsies' Woodstock demolition of "Star Spangled Banner." Indeed the whole Standards package is ludicrously provocative, with all its sonics wrapped inside a sleeve featuring a destroyed American flag, distorted between red beams of video flicker as if torn apart and haphazardly pieced back together. Then there's the title, Standards, as in standard bearers, leading the parade? Or as in jazz standards, the Prima Matena, The Shit? Help me out, Bitney. "Man, ever since we did that flag thing I'm seeing it everywhere," he bursts. "I know people are gonna be like, 'Oh, so that's what they're trying to say,' and I'm almost afraid of it. I mean I've gone through a wild bunch of emotions since the election. I voted for Nader and there was a whole bunch of bullshit like you're stealing a vote from Gore. Obviously I knew Nader couldn't win — that he'd never be a President. But I want a third party to be a factor, we need another option. Democrats and Republicans are the same fucking robots — it's such bullshit. Think of it like this — imagine you were reading about a country in Africa where someone was running for President whose dad had previously been President and been head of the CIA and he wins not the popular vote but this antiquated electoral college thing. It would be enough for America to send in the fuckin' troops! To restore democracy!" He lights a cigarette and crosses over in laughter. "Now, when we made Standards I felt like we just wanted to make this raw kind of statement." He continues. "We recorded it straight to tape, just hit it too hard, totally overloaded it — made it crunch. Now we got all this other shit to think about." He keeps a straight face for all of 20 seconds.

**D**oug McCormick, Tortoise's bassist (and, alongside drummer Johnny Herndon, its founding member), feels much the same way. In person he's a real giant and immediately strikes me as the group's most solid member. He's also quite capable of taking his ass off. "When we began work on Standards, the only thing we really talked about was the fact that we wanted to create something that would have this immediate feeling of impact," he beams. "More compact, more visceral and more rockin' — easier to grasp right away. I mean our last record, *TNT*, was a great achievement for us but I think none of us felt we had ever made a record that would grab you straight off. I think Sonny Sharrock's name might even have been mentioned when we were recording that first track — we just wanted it really loud, this guitar

thing exploding with no time underneath it. It's awesome — we were all laughing so hard when we cut it, none of us could believe what we'd done, and I think right there we broke down a lot of the preconceptions we had about our own band." Herndon's own take is more hilariously succinct: "To me there's just something so in-your-own-face about it," he laughs. "Yeah — that's it! In our own fucking face!"

In fact, Standards draws much of its visceral power from the group's collective background in American hardcore. With the exception of guitarist Jeff Parker, who came up through the ranks of jazz, all of the players' formative musical experiences took place in the back of a tatty van, hauling ass across the States, spending days jamming in practice spaces, staying up all night posting flyers for shows. Throughout our conversation, drummer John McEnire succinctly reiterates this point, that the roots of Tortoise are sunk deep in rock. He's not unfriendly, but you quickly get the feeling that, for him, interviews are merely one of these necessary evils you have to put up with if you intend to make a career out of music. However, he still chews over every question at length, carefully wording his replies to avoid any possibility of them ever being reduced to glib soundbites. "The whole ethos of hardcore was real important to us," he emphasises. "And I think it still totally informs what we do now. It's pretty subconscious at this point but it's something that you refer to from time to time — not in any calculated way, but things trigger it — ideas, an attitude about something. I know it's vague but having those experiences informs you later in life."

**I** moved to Chicago in 1980" McCormick adds. "I was into punk rock and when I came here so many things just started happening. In about 1981 Big Black started and Steve Albini put out a record that was so inspirational. He just put together this whole EP by himself [Big Black Live, 1982] — played bass and guitar, did all the vocals, released it himself. Loads of other bands had already done that but they were all like 'real' bands. This was just some guy on his own and that had a really big effect. Shortly after that all these records started coming out. The scene was so healthy and no one was afraid to work really hard, to join jobs to support themselves, to practise all the time — maybe play music four or five nights a week and then go out and flyer all night long to promote shows." He gazes out into the blizzard. "Even in weather like this I remember being out there doing it."

"As far as I'm concerned, all we've ever been is a rock band," McEnire reiterates. "Maybe a slightly unconventional rock band, but isn't that always what it was about? It's very easy for journalists to create the idea that there's some kind of a reaction happening, like we were out to destroy rock or something. I think we're way more grounded in our traditions than anyone has ever given us credit for. Like the stuff that Doug does in *Eleventh Dream Day* is completely foundational to what we do in Tortoise and a lot of writers miss these points. Doug's experience in the band — playing all these classic, extended rock things that draw on stuff like Television or Neil Young. Look at how he writes, how he approaches sound. That's the sort of thing he adds, that shows up in what we do as Tortoise too. Look at Dan Bitney's hardcore background in The Tar Babies — everybody's history is much stronger and much more rooted than you might be led to believe on the surface."

The whole notion of being 'post-rock' always implied that 'rock' was basic and unsophisticated (which at its best it often is), and had run its course to become nothing more than a generic strapshot. Yet the basic tenets of rock music — the beauty and power that comes from jamming on the group mind, the primal earth rhythms, the expectant, anything could happen buzz of the amps, the sense of utopian striving that always comes from playing as part of a collective — still seem to me the foundation upon which all life-affirming music is made. Rather than leave rock music for dead, Tortoise have re-injected it with its original sense of vast potential. They were quick to realise that the advent of ultra-sophisticated music technology needn't spell its end, and that adapting new working strategies could in fact only bolster its freewheeling tradition. So Tortoise keep the feel of collective brainstorming by rethinking their approach to technology, where studio creation and the endless opportunities of the computer edit replace the practice room jam. They've also opened up rock to a whole host of potentially integrating influences. Alongside Sonic Youth, they've ported up the spiritual affinities inherent in all high energy music.





taking on board everything from minimalist composition and musique concrète through dub, avant electronics and HoHop. That all they've birthed so far is an endless conveyor belt of geeky bass-led math-rock copyists is hardly their fault — everyone that ever breaks new ground inevitably attracts a trail of clueless, drooling fanboys.

Chicago's reputation as a centre for creative freethinking is still unassailable, it has always boasted an open minded, participatory music scene. In the early 80s, its then-nascent hardcore movement acted as a lightning rod for suburban kids throughout the Midwest. John Haggerty and Jeff Pozzani's Naked Raygun were kings of the local circuit, combining ear-shredding guitar noise with angular art-punk copped directly from UK groups like Wire and Gang Of Four. Indeed, Chicago has always had a worrying relationship with the UK's anaemic art rock scene. There, people actually admire dreck like The Stranglers, and during the early 80s, local groups like The Ethies and Strike Under always sounded more Buzzcocks than Beethovens. "There was a certain contingent in Chicago that was really influenced by a lot of British bands of the time," McCombs confirms. "Especially Wire. Ask anybody in Naked Raygun or Big Black and they'd say Stranglers, Gang Of Four and Killing Joke — all of which I was into."

McCombs arrived in Chicago looking to join a group, and spent his first few years in the city playing in an experimental performance art outfit before landing the job as bass player in local psych-rockers Eleventh Dream Day. A role he still has today. Formed by the husband and wife team of guitarist/vocalist Rick Rizzo and drummer/vocalist Janet Bean, Eleventh Dream Day originally came from Kentucky, playing extended acid-tinged rock that drew on the comedown sounds of LA's Paisley Underground scene as much as from Neil Young's guitar roar. "They were looking for a bassist and second guitarist, just trying to expand into a quartet, and I knew the guy they wanted on guitar, so I got the gig," McCombs recalls. "Rick and I both really liked Gang Of Four and Wire, but also Television and that first Dream Syndicate album that had just come out. We had a more 'classic rock' sounding version of punk than most of the other Chicago bands. That was my first full-time group." In 89 they signed to Atlantic, and over the next few years McCombs would spend a lot of time out of town and on the road.

Johnny Herndon was another kid who came to Chicago looking to hook up with like-minded musicians. In person he turns out to be the quietest member of

Tortoise and in some ways the most intense, but you get the feeling that, come the weekend, he's a welder. We spend a memorable afternoon hanging round his apartment above McEntire's Soma studio, blasting The New York Art Quartet's ESP-Disk and watching the snow reshape Chicago from two stories up. Although born in Long Island, New York, Herndon moved to North Carolina when he was ten, growing up on some land his parents owned in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. He was into all the dumb teen-rock staples — Kiss, Rush, The Stones — but through his skateboarding pals he soon picked up on punk. "My friend had ramps in his basement," he explains. "So we would go and ride and listen to everything — Adam And The Ants, Ramones, Vapors, Judas Priest, AC/DC. There were no lines drawn between rock and punk, just whatever was high-energy. Soon I started reading *Trouser Press* and after I picked up "Jealous Again" by Black Flag I was off. I eventually moved to LA after I graduated high school and began seeing great bands like Fear, 7 Seconds and Crass, and suddenly the idea really dawned on me that you could be a musician without having to act like some superstar — you could do your own fanzine, put on shows, even make your own record." Herndon eventually hooked up with The Poster Children, a dynamic heavy guitar unit that was signed to Sire and made a couple of records with Steve Albini at the helm (afterwards, the group eventually morphed into Salaryman). Yet between their two full-time concerns McCombs and Herndon still found time to work on a new studio project — one that was to focus primarily on rhythm and repetition, with a strict no-guitars policy.

"I'd become friends with Johnny Herndon," McCombs explains. "At one point I had a group with some of the guys from his band, but it never really went anywhere and it sorta turned out that Johnny and I kept on working together. At first we were heavily influenced by a lot of SS1 stuff but we were really trying to experiment. We were playing around with the idea of having a band that wasn't like a traditional rock band, because we both played in bands that were like that already and we were looking for different way to explore our individual instruments. By that time we were both starting to listen to a lot of new stuff including a lot of jazz and some more avant garde type stuff, so we stuck with the idea that it would just be drums and bass, just the two of us. Most of the first Tortoise singles are just me and Johnny doing a lot of overdubs and that's when we realised that we definitely needed more people in the group. It wasn't working the way we wanted it to as a duo. We played those tapes for John McEntire and Bundy Brown — they were the rhythm section for Bastro at the time — and we liked the way they played."



David Grubbs had been playing in a group called Bastro ever since his first group Squirrel Bait imploded in Louisville, Kentucky. Squirrel Bait's second guitarist, Bren McMahon, had gone on to form Sinti with drummer Britt Waldorf and guitarist Dave Pajo. "Bastro was Beefheartian post-hardcore to start with," McEntire recalls. "But there's this whole period that never got documented, just prior to when it turned into *Gastr Del Sol*, where we were doing electronic versions of the songs that eventually turned up on the first *Gastr* record. *The Serpentine Smiler*. That was really interesting and I wish we'd recorded some of that in retrospect." Prior to Bastro, McEntire had been studying electronic music at college in Ohio, an experience that, though he's loath to admit it, really peeled the scales from his eyes. "It's true," he sighs. "Being at that music school was good for me — being exposed to avant garde classical and World Music. When I applied to school I originally went as a percussion major, but I realised it wasn't gonna work, so I switched over to the electronic music thing because I was really interested in it — it worked out, luckily. Then I wanted to use these approaches in my own music, not just straight up appropriating it, but at least having a wider frame of reference than just three chord guitar rock. Bastro was the first time those ideas really came into play. I first moved to Chicago in the summer of '91 because Grubbs was going to school here. We kept Bastro going and I met Bundy Bundy through Grubbs who knew him from this radio show he had at the University of Chicago. He eventually joined Bastro on bass."

Bundy (aka Kenny) Brown is a key player in the whole Chicago music scene, yet in retrospect his role in Tortoise is likely to be relegated to the level of Angus MacLise in The Velvet Underground. He was the first player to put his foot down in an attempt to halt the irresistible momentum that Tortoise gathered in the wake of the runaway success of their debut LP, and he was also the first to leave, parting company with the group after the release of the *Gomero* EP (Duphonic 1995). His departure brought the first energetic phase of Tortoise to a close. These days he seems to have a million half-finished projects on the go — he's still working on a new *Directions In Music* disc, the group that most directly mirrors his work in Tortoise, and there's a new Pullman CD due on Thrill Jockey, a stellar collection of American Primitive guitar picking and lunar electronics. He's a complex character who seems to have a history of achieving things, only to toss them aside and move on to the next challenge. Since Tortoise he's been working nights as a paramedic and engineering sessions for everyone from avant rockers to straightforward jazzers. Word is he's now getting into dealing in fine wines, and everyone I speak to has a different Bundy tale



and a different account of how he came to leave. He may have been gone five years, but he's still very much a presence in the group today.

Bundy originally washed up in Chicago back in 1985, when he began booking groups to play on the university campus, while also hosting a college radio show, through which he made contact with most of the key local musicians. It was while sharing a flat with David Grubbs that he began to play in Bastro, eventually going on to help out in *Gastr Del Sol*. "There were a lot of things happening back then," Bundy recalls. "I was in *Gastr Del Sol* and Tortoise simultaneously and part of the impetus with Tortoise was that we wanted to move away from the loud rock guitar bands we had been in — we were all getting ready to take it to the next stage. But at that point none of us had the skills or the facilities to run a band like Tortoise — a studio band, basically. There's only so much experimentation you can do at home on a four-track."

"Things really changed through having McEntire on board," Herndon admits. "His studies of electronic music really opened up that whole area." By this point Herndon was already digging deep into electronic music, scouring the bins for Old School Hip-hop, Public Enemy and fucked up noisy dub from Adrian Sherwood and On-U Sound. "Then along comes McEntire, who had an actual knowledge of the inner workings of this stuff. It was great. And we would have stayed a studio band if we hadn't been offered a gig with The Ex, one of our favourite bands." Dan Bitney came on board — "Because I had timbals!" he claims — and they went ahead with their debut show despite the fact that The Ex were turned back at immigration and never made the gig. Now a full working unit, they set to work on their debut self-titled LP, recorded in a week at the beginning of December 1993.

Tortoise sounds like nothing else they've ever done since — the production is an absolute joy, with plenty of murky depth effectively highlighting the majestic bass-on-bass weave. At points it still sounds like some late night pirate broadcast beamed from somewhere over the horizon, all cloaked in shortwave wow and flutter. "Sinti were really important to us at that point," McEntire confesses. "It's definitely in there somewhere. I can still remember the first time I heard them — in a way they developed this thing that I heard in my head — this thing that I imagined myself playing. Their second LP, [1991's] *Spalderford*, completely changed a lot of things, it made a lot of people think about music in a different way. There was such an attention to detail that just combined to make the whole thing like this total experience — people weren't spending that much time thinking of things like that. It was definitely there on the first album in some way. But you also have to realise that

there was a certain amount of common development that was happening with McIntire, Bundy and Dave Grubbs being so closely linked to Slint in Bastrop. There was a pool of common experience there that they were sharing, that was leading them in similar directions. Johnny and I were more removed from that, being up in Chicago. Still, with the first album we knew we were really on the verge of developing our own personal thing—that this band would be a really good expression of who we are and where we're coming from. It was really an exciting time to be working on that record—I had this feeling that I knew that I'd finally found this. I dunno." He looks at me as if he's just about to make some embarrassing confession. "Suddenly, I guess, I just had a lot of hope for the future."

Bundy, on the other hand, was already starting to feel disillusioned. "At that point in time I had pretty strong ideas about the way I wanted to go about the business of making music," he ventures. "Let's just say I had strong ideas about what was right and wrong." He hums and splutters for a few minutes, acts distracted as if he's not sure how much he really wants to go over this. "OK—this was the catalyst. I was unhappy with the idea of doing a whole lot of touring, and then on the eve of the European tour one of the English music papers sent some writers over to do a story on us and we didn't have any shows booked. So they went and booked a show for these writers coming over! I was like, 'Man, I don't play on demand for any writer! That's just stupid.' So I just blew up and decided, right, I'm not going to do the European tour. Fuck it. In retrospect, I don't think what they did was so bad, but when you're young, you're idealistic about making music and the way it's commodified. At the same point there was the Joy Division compilation being made [*Mojave To An End*, Virgin 1995] and the idea that the A&R person pitched to us to get us to do it was, 'Well, we know Steve Albini is a big fan of Joy Division and we know Tortoise are too, so would you two collaborate on something?' Albini's immediate reply was, 'Well, you know what? You're right on both those counts, but I would never record a cover of a Joy Division song nor would I ever perform one with my band. The money you're offering is meaningless in terms of influencing me to do it.' But for Tortoise it was the most money we'd ever been offered—more money than we could imagine making on our first album. Now of course, that isn't the case, due to years of royalties. But then everyone was like, 'We like Joy Division and taking part in it's not something that professionally disgusts us,' but at the same time Albini asked us, 'If someone wasn't offering you a big fat lump of cash to do it would you ever record a Joy Division song?' And I thought, 'No, I wouldn't.' So when you try to make your living from music professionally you have to make decisions that aren't like selling out, that aren't hesitant to you, but you are taking money to make music that otherwise you wouldn't be making. I had a hard time living with those decisions." (For the record, Tortoise went ahead with their cover of "As You Said.")

I ask him if he has any regrets about leaving Tortoise when he did, and for a long time he simply doesn't reply. "Tortoise went on to become the big thing," he starts. "Thrill Jockey also became really big and as a result I was able to sit at home, not go on tour and just make records that sold largely thanks to the work Thrill Jockey and Tortoise went on to do without me. I didn't put in any of the hard work but benefited from it. Which is worse? Selling out in these minor ways that were so bad at the time that I had to be quiet, or staying at home and absorbing the benefits of all this work that I wasn't willing to do anyway, even if I was in the band? I don't regret it in that it gave me an opportunity to focus on doing my own stuff, but I do look at recordings like some of the stuff on *Millions Now Living* and *TNT* and I would have loved to participate in those, so to a certain extent, yes, I have some regrets about that."

The *Gomero* EP was to be Bundy's parting shot—and what a way to go. The title track still stands as one of Tortoise's finest moments, a first pass through all the shadowy areas Bundy would later flesh out with *Directions In Music*. Circular, ever-repeating guitar patterns pass like Chinese whippers through the various lead instruments, and what starts out as a melancholic title hymn explodes in a whirlwind of kinetic energy, peaking with the whole group riding into the sun on an irresistibly motoric groove. The greater leap of the *Upliside* out, "Giff Dweaker Society," effectively pointed the way towards *Millions Now Living*—a delicious series of out-of-control compositions, spliced together with the dream logic of *The Four Tops*. "To me *Gomero* is the absolute zenith of that line-up of Tortoise," Bundy proclaims. "It's a complete realization of all of our ideas at that point in much the same way that *TNT* is the ultimate expression of the current

Tortoise. *TNT* totally eclipses *Millions Now Living* because I kind of left them hanging and they didn't have time to get up to speed in the studio when they made that record. So a lot of the ideas that are halfway there on *Millions* are totally there on *TNT*—I guess *Gomero* truly fleshed out the ideas on the first album."

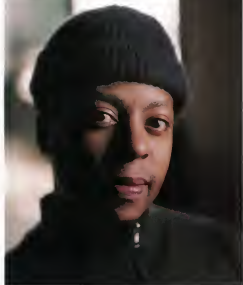
It's a fair comment. *Millions Now Living* Will Never Die, Tortoise's second album proper, released in early 1996 (the limited "versions" album *Rhythms, Resolutions & Clusters*, also released on collectible vinyl in the US, plugged the between-album gap) has always felt like a series of sketches waiting for an animating spark. However, bassist Dave Pajo, fresh from Slint, was more than capable of filling Bundy's shoes. "Pajo has a unique sound and writing sensibility," McIntire asserts. "It was interesting because Bundy was the same way—within the group he had a very strong personality, sonically speaking. Going to Pajo was kinda bizarre, because we couldn't do some of the older tunes in the same way, but Pajo wrote great parts and he fit right in." It was around the time of *Millions Now Living* that Tortoise began to be discussed in terms of jazz—a description which still puzzles them. "I just don't hear the jazz reference," McIntire admits. "It's taking a very reductionist view to say that anything that has more than three chords in it is jazz. People were like, 'Duh, they have vibes, they must be jazz.'" Tortoise's use of mallet instruments owes more to artists like Steve Reich and Philip Glass or the bouncing percussive joy of American composers like Morton Gould and Harry Partch than it does to the likes of The Modern Jazz Quartet. Still, for Doug McCombs, *Millions Now Living* was an important record in that it marked a real step forward in terms of the group's compositional approach. "As a group we're simply not comfortable improving in a traditional way," he admits. "Jeff Parker obviously is, but if you ask Johnny Herndon to play a vibes solo he's very reluctant to do so and McIntire hardly does any unimproved stuff on the mallet instruments. He comes from a more regimented style of playing, where there's a more direct frame of reference—basically repetitive minimalism. For instance, 'Died' on *Millions* was a key track for us. I really think of it like an extension of the ideas on *Gomero*, those cut and paste techniques—putting together all these different sections, then remaking. On *Millions* we really set out to try and explore our abilities compositionally, we were still in the process of developing a way of working together, where everyone could put in their ideas and make it come out as something that works. It's not jamming, there's a very clear of that. We'd show each other basic ideas and try to build them up. But when we started work on *TNT*, that process suddenly blew right open."

**T***N*T 1998's double album, is an incredibly dense recording, a sprawling work that you can live in for months without ever really getting to know its every twist and turn. It was the first record to feature guitarist Jeff Parker, who relieved Pajo to allow him to concentrate on Papa M, and the first that Tortoise recorded entirely on computer using ProTools. The resultant freeing up of the compositional process kept them tied down for a year. "Suddenly the recording was wide open," McCombs enthuses. "We didn't have to have anything on tape, we could just write with these small sound sources and build on them." *TNT* is a completely artificial creation, full of impossibly minute sound sources converging in supernaturally deep structures only to dissolve and reconfigure themselves once more. Every time you return, its landscapes seem to have subtly altered. You can't step into the same *TNT* twice.

"The problem with *TNT*—if there was one—was too many possibilities," McIntire shrugs. "Our work was generally successful in the 24 track studio precisely because there were limits and we tried to push them as much as we could. When we got into the computer those limits disappeared, and suddenly you're wandering in the void with no end in mind. I love it, it's my favourite record, but I can totally understand why people were put off by it because it demands your attention." McCombs agrees. "It was a learning experience. We learned that spending a year on an album might not be the best thing to do. But we felt it best to pay as much attention to detail...to every tiny aspect of every song—because we had the opportunity and we'd never had it before. What would the outcome be?"

"*TNT* is the best Tortoise record," Bundy states. "It's epic. I like the new one, but I just don't know how it's gonna be received. I think they made a conscious effort to have a different approach, but my personal opinion of that record is the same way I feel about the new *Isotope 217* record. I know a lot of those guys think the new *Isotope*





record totally encapsulates what they're about, but it's been really harshly received by critics, and to a certain extent I can understand why. People saw it as unfinished ideas or inside jokes and I think *Standards* will be received similarly poorly. Tortoise has always been about making records that are important to Tortoise and are meaningful to them — to push their own creative envelope — but when you reach a certain degree of popularity you have to start to live up to people's expectations. When you make a monumental recording like *TNT*, people's expectations are gonna be set pretty high. For better or for worse, whether Tortoise subscribe to this viewpoint or not, there is this popular school of thought that they are at the vanguard of some kind of movement. People expect them to carry the torch, so when they decide to follow their own direction instead of carrying it... I dunno, maybe people will like it. I enjoy listening to it and when I saw them play the new material live it was great. I think that for a moment they recaptured some of the energy they had when I was in the group because I think they lost a lot of that. I remember seeing them in these huge venues, playing songs that were three years old. That was never what Tortoise were about."

The raucous euphoria that really defines the new record is partly attributable to the fact that, for the first time in their history, they performed the songs live before recording them. Under the guise of Woodout, they played a series of secret shows, even opening for their buddies The Eternals. As a result the tracks were lubricated well before they hit magnetic tape. "We did five little shows," McEntire explains. "I think it really helped us out — we went back and re-recorded a few tracks and they definitely benefited from playing them out live. On *Standards* there's a huge range of compositional approaches — one would be based on just one idea, say a rhythm or a bunch of chords, a riff or something while another might be completely mapped out with a chord sequence, a melody and ideas for changes and arrangements. It's still very collective but it wasn't like we ever sat down and decided exactly what we wanted. *Standards* to sound like. However, once we started working on it, it quickly became apparent how it was gonna go. It wasn't a direct reaction against any of our other work, like *TNT* or whatever, but there was this unspoken feeling that we wanted to do something really direct — shorter songs, more compact structures, something really visceral. With *Standards* there was a desire to get back to having at least three people playing live as the basic foundation of the songs — further down the line I think we'll have a better time playing them out live. With *TNT* it was an endeavour to learn the songs after we recorded them, just figuring out how to play all the parts in this sprawling thing."



The timing of *Standards* couldn't be more appropriate: in the wake of the American election it inevitably hits like a bomb. Yet it's not all fire music evangelism. Minus the shivery processed flim of *TNT*, Tortoise's electronics have never sounded quite so fleshily evocative, so tactile. Tracks like "Benway" catch the thrill of illuminated expressway travel in a widescreen as panoramic as To Rococo Rot's, while "Firefly" harks back to the lunar broadcasts of the first album. In "Monica" there's even some real sleazy hot-pants electronica that sounds so shot full of coke it could almost be Italian. Still, you can't walk away from *Standards* without blood on your hands. "Unfortunately for me it all falls into place a bit too conveniently," McCombs laments. "Obviously you can't use the American flag innocently — it's so loaded and it's gonna be interesting to see what people think. When it was suggested, all of our immediate reactions were, 'Well, we can't do that! That would be fucked up.' But then after that we were like, 'It's so fucked up we should do it.' Unfortunately now in the wake of the fuckin' election everyone is gonna ask us to explain ourselves. It's whether or not we're articulate enough to explain our motivations, when a lot of the time I don't think we even know ourselves. A lot of the time we make a decision because it's against our first instincts, to keep ourselves challenged, to not take the easy route. Still I don't have a developed theory I'll say this much. I think it's impossible not to be affected by America and by Chicago specifically. I have strong feelings about Chicago. It's got a great history of being the working man's hub for the rest of the country — all the railroads come here, all the shipping yards — and that filters down into the arts, right back to the formation of the AACM. People are not afraid to work hard here, to do what they wanna do. Still, we need a hell of a lot of things fixed."

"You're asking me how I really feel? I don't feel either Bush or Gore was going to do anything great for this country. To this day and age there's terrible racism — in this city! This city had become one of the most segregated cities in the country. At the same time I'm always torn. I know there's no perfect place in the world. And, sure, there are great things about our country, great things about being American, things I wouldn't trade for the world and things I'm horribly ashamed of — like the way people are treated and the way we treat other countries. I would like to see a major change but what can you do, how can you force people to change?"

"It had to seem fucked up," Hamdon reiterates. "And it really is. A fucked American flag. It's a bizarre chain of events that we weren't planning on but it seems really appropriate at this point — like what are the fuckin' standards here?" [Standards is released this month on Warp (Europe) and Third Jackery (US). In April, Tortoise curate the All Tomorrow's Parties festival at Cornish Sands, and perform with Tom Zee in London Barbican's Only Connect festival. See Out There for advance details.]

# WAR GAMES IN HELL

At the end of 1999, American musician/composer **Bob Ostertag** decided to tour his politically sensitive multimedia piece, *Yugoslavia Suite*, in the shellshocked regions of the Balkans. The following extracts from his tour diary detail his descent into a nightmare of mounting hostile reactions, police interference and technical disasters in the Serbian war zone

As well as being a musician and composer, American Bob Ostertag has also worked as a journalist and political organizer. In the 70s he spent time with the freedom fighters of El Salvador. During the 90s, he wrote a large-scale electronic work inspired by the break-up of Yugoslavia called *Yugoslavia Suite*, comprising both sonic and visual elements. The first part, *War Games*, involved Ostertag playing a computer game devised by himself, constructed by merging flight-simulator shoot-'em-up games with actual US military footage of pilots' eye views of bomb attacks from the Yugoslavian and Iraqi campaigns. As Ostertag says, "The game images look more realistic, and the real war images look more like what most people think of as games."

The second section, *These Hands*, required an extra video artist — Ostertag's colleague Richard Board — to project real-time footage of his hands into the frame, which were merged into documentary film of the Yugoslavian war: thus a hand could wipe a tear from a refugee's eye, or shake the hand of President Milosevic.

In late 1999, Ostertag wanted to take this highly charged *Suite* right into the heart of the former Yugoslavia because, in his words, "Never had I felt so passionately about an issue about which I could not decide on a position." Although he broadly supported Western military help for besieged Bosnia in the mid-90s, Ostertag was appalled by NATO's misdirected attempt to deal with the later crisis in Kosovo, located at the southern end of the country, by targeting Serbian industrial coxes such as Belgrade and Novi Sad, which lie to the north. Ostertag felt that in order to develop his composition, he would need to perform it in Serbia itself.

Ostertag and Board encountered problems from day one: the USA had ceased diplomatic relations with Yugoslavia, so they had to apply for visas in Canada. Even then, after weeks of no response, only Ostertag was granted a visa to enter Serbia. He organised a tour which took in Budapest, just across the border in Hungary, hoping that they might obtain Board's visa there. But when the day of departure came, the pair boarded the plane with the matter unresolved. The following is extracted from Ostertag's diary of the ensuing 11 days.

BOB YOUNG

## Monday 11 October 1999: Arrival

We arrive for the first leg of the tour in Ljubljana, capital of Slovenia, the northernmost province of what used to be Yugoslavia. We are met by Miha Zadnikar, the tall, bearded director of the Cinematech of Slovenia. He teaches sociology and with him are two of his students, videotaping our arrival and every move. Somehow all five of us and all the gear cram into a little Yugo and zip off to the capital as the radio blares "American Pie".

## Tuesday 12 October: The first hurdle

The next day we discover a continuing pattern that will follow us around the tour: the organisers have not read our detailed list of technical needs, so the day is spent frantically trying to put together the sound system, video projector and theatrical lights needed for the show. Richard deals with these problems while I try to communicate

with the organisers up ahead in Belgrade via e-mail, trying to come up with an alternative to canceling the Serbian leg of the trip [due to Board's lack of visa].

There is a further problem that will follow us around as well. This is my first time touring a show that uses computers this extensively, and software I have written myself. Bugs start to emerge. All the time I am not trying to send e-mail to Belgrade, I am frantically trying to debug my programming.

Any one of these problems would have made for a stressful day. But the combination of putting a complex show together without the right equipment, with risky political content in an unfamiliar part of the world, with both the future of the tour and the current state of the software in doubt, pushes the stress load right off the meter. I am glad for the bounteous offerings of alcohol.

With one hour to go the software just isn't working. I am on stage poring through computer code. The national television has sent a crew to shoot the show and interview me. We are just discovering that we are actually big news. Americans in an area Americans usually bypass, doing a concert on a political situation most Americans know little about, just months after the war.

I keep the TV crew on hold, however, and keep trying to fix my code. Finally, with a few minutes to go before showtime, I think I have the problem solved and the sell-out crowd comes in. Amazingly, the concert runs without a hitch. A little ragged, to be sure, but not bad for the first show. The audience response is effusive. But mixed with the congratulations and thanks, several times I am questioned "You are going to do that piece in Serbia?"

## Wednesday 13 October: Rumbles of discontent

Tuesday begins completely up in the air. We are supposed to do a gig in Koper, a small town near the sea, but it is looking like a long shot. The gig is at a club run by Marko Brecej, Yugoslavia's main rock star of the 1960s generation — in fact he organised a Frank Zappa gig in Yugoslavia long before other Western rock bands appeared in Eastern Europe. Brecej cut quite an eccentric figure in 1968, and the intervening three decades have not brought him closer to the mainstream.

What he does not do very well, it seems, is organise concerts. Though the concert is tonight, he has not secured any of the equipment, nor, more urgently, our transportation to Koper. The one thing that everyone coming in and out of the office in Ljubljana agrees on is that Marko is an exceptional man and we must go to Koper, if only to meet him. Finally, Marko succeeds in getting a personal friend, Marko Koper, to drive us to Koper. Richard, the instruments, the backpacks, Kosnik and myself pile into his tiny Yugo.

Several hours later, we arrive at the club in Koper — a punk rock dive with graffiti-covered walls, a kitchen in which Marko Brecej's wife, Anja, is cooking us eggs, numerous other people coming and going, and none of the technical things we need to do the concert.

I finally reach the Belgrade organisers by phone and they are adamant I must come. I hang up and approach Kosnik (who revealed himself during the drive to be a skilled video artist) with a plan: Why doesn't he come with me to Belgrade? He knows the technology, he knows Belgrade, and he saw the show last night in Ljubljana. Richard

This laptop kills fascists: Bob Ostertag performing his *War Games* piece



can train him tonight. As a Slovenian citizen, he can get a visa, no problem. Kosnik thinks carefully. His schedule is busy. Finally, he looks me in the eye and says, "So what you really have in mind is being something like video guerrillas taking it right into the heart of the beast, right?"

"More or less, that's it," I reply.

"Then I have to do it."

Finally the show comes together: everything works, all is well. The crowd is the sort that has become typical for me in recent years: small but quite passionate about my work. But the audience reaction is decidedly mixed, much more so than the previous night. One man, a crane operator by day, dislikes the work to the point of agitation. He points out that we show an image of the Mostar bridge exploding right after showing an image of Bosnian Serb commander Ratko Mladic. "But the Croats blew up that bridge," he exclaims. "It's another lie."

I knew the Croats blew up the 14th century Mostar bridge. In fact, on my bulletin board at home is a newspaper clipping with the Croat commander on the scene, lecturing an incredulous reporter as his men were destroying the bridge. "Don't worry," he proclaimed. "We Croats will build another bridge in its place, more beautiful and more ancient."

I am learning how much identity counts in the Balkans. We're talking shades of white. The only way to make sense of these wars is as religious wars. Then everything becomes quite clear: Orthodox versus Catholic versus Muslim. El Salvador, my only other war experience, was a class war. I am realising how little that experience can help me navigate where I am now. One person at the show whose feedback I seek out in particular is Sasha Mikrozic. Sasha is a giant bear of a man who performs around the Balkans as a storyteller and, happening to be in Koper, came to the show. He also lives in Belgrade and works with my future hosts there, Free B92 Radio. Sasha is the first Serb to see our show, and I am quite curious as to his reaction. Though he is a professional talker, he is extremely reluctant to discuss the concert. He is obviously disturbed. Finally, he says, "Well, OK. We Serbs are the bad guys. So?" I ask if he thinks it would be appropriate to do the show in Serbia. Several times his mouth says "yes" while his tone and demeanour speak a loud "no." It is extremely unsettling.

Richard and I are invited to spend the night in Marko Brece's apartment. After more drinks, we are at his modest abode, and it is 4am. Richard and I have to be on a train at 6am. We catch a catnap, then return to the club in a suitor to pick up the gear. Marko grabs a laptop, sets it on top of a wall and turns around to unlock the car door. The laptop crashes to the street. Marko is profusely apologetic, but there is no time for that. We assure him all is fine, and rush off to the train.

## Thursday 14 October: Into the interior

We arrive in Maribor, the second city of Slovenia. Here we play at a venue called Kiba, a surprisingly well equipped multimedia centre. Kiba feels very Western. Off from the bar is an internet cafe, equipped with numerous computers with high speed connections, and full of teenagers surfing the Web.

Unlike the first two gigs, the Kiba folks have read the tech rider and have everything

we need. Yet bizarre problems plague the set-up. Cable after cable seems to go bad. We get shocks from the gear. Finally, Richard gets out his volt meter and checks the power in the hall. The outlets at the back, where the video projector is plugged in, are wired differently, and the two grounds are off by 110 volts! We have just cooked the solder off most of our cables. Frantic rearrangements ensue, continuing right up until showtime.

Somehow everything comes together and we play by far our best show. But the audience offers only cursory applause before quickly filing out. I am mystified.

Dinner and drinks follow. Once again, our hosts could not be more gracious. I press them about whether I should go ahead and do the show in Serbia, should that prove possible. Aleksandra Kostic, one of Kiba's curators, thinks not only should I not do the piece in Serbia, she thinks it is inappropriate for me to do it anywhere in the Balkans. "The images you use," she explains, "we have a completely different relation with them than you or anyone else who is not from the Balkans can have. We have seen them every day for ten years. At first we cried over them. Now we watch them over dinner without a second thought. You cannot know this experience. Your piece is very good, don't get me wrong. You should definitely do the piece — in Austria. Do it in Germany. Certainly do it in the US. But do not come here and do this piece. It is wrong." The fallout from her outburst occupies the rest of the evening. As we part company she says once more: "Don't do this in Serbia, unless you don't mind coming back without your teeth."

I turn this over and over in my mind before falling asleep. I think she is right. This is the first time I have used video with my music, and I am learning how different image and sound are. It is very rare that a sound, by itself, will carry such specific, personal, social and political baggage as an image. Though we do not all hear sound the same way, the difference in how we see images is much greater. This difference is greatly magnified by the media. In San Francisco I really had to dig to find the images I used in Maribor; I could have taken them from the TV almost any night in the last ten years.

## Friday 15 October: A sideways leap

Today we head to Budapest, Hungary for one more show before Serbia. That is, if I do in fact go to Serbia. It is our first day with no concert, and we are thankful for it.

In Budapest we are to hook up with Jozsef Cseres, a professor of aesthetics from the University of Bratislava who has been instrumental in helping set up this tour. He is planning on going to Serbia at the same time as I am, to take part in an art show in Novi Sad. "Plan Z" is that in Budapest we teach Jozsef to do Richard's work, and that Jozsef do the concerts with me in Serbia. The number of factors to weigh — the complexity of each, the dimming time before a decision has to be made, and the accumulating sleep deprivation and alcohol in the bloodstream — leaves me extremely stressed out. I begin to feel sick.

## Saturday 16 October: Budapest

In Budapest things go wrong from the moment we arrive at the venue. Our concert is at the very grand Palace of Fine Art in central Budapest, but inside we find a dismal

Outing in Novi Sad, Serbia, 1999



situation that is all too typical of my experiences of such places. Though the building is gigantic, our concert has been banished to a lecture hall in the basement. Serious work will have to be done to mount the concert in this room. Unfortunately, that is not what the technical crew has in mind. The crew views concerts like ours as an irritation imposed upon them by some bureaucrat who for some reason cannot be happy simply putting on the more mainstream fare upstairs. And they view us as rank amateurs who have no idea what we are doing. They have not even looked at the technical rider. And when we show it to them, they simply do not believe that we actually need the gear we request. It is going to be a very long day — a fight to the wire to get the show up and ready by curtain time.

Any thoughts of spending the day training Jozef to do our show are scrapped. In fact, all thoughts of anything other than getting the show together go out the window. Things are not helped by the fact that I now have a full-fledged fever, cough and sore throat. All I want to do is lie down. For the fourth time in four concerts, the set-up takes the entire day, night up to, and in fact, a few minutes past showtime.

After the show, which was not surprisingly sub-par, we discuss the concert with audience members. There is one man from Serbia, and of course I seek out his opinion. He is ethnically Hungarian, part of the Hungarian minority in the northern Serbian province of Vojvodina. He is very moved by the piece, and he thanks me effusively for the evening. But he is quite taken aback when he hears that I might be leaving for Serbia the next day. "You can do this concert in Vojvodina," he says. "This will be fine. But do not do this piece in Belgrade. They will kill you."

## Sunday 17 October: Crossing the line

[Ostertag finally decides to risk crossing the Serbian border to perform a reduced version of *Yugoslavia Suite* on his own, without a second performer.] I am going [to Serbia]. I will play one set of improvised music, and the first half of *Yugoslavia Suite*. *War Games*. I will leave the desktop computer and all the accessories necessary to play the second movement with Richard in Budapest. With nothing but the two laptops I can do the stripped-down show I have decided on. But we have to move quickly.

Jozef agrees to come along. His art show has been cancelled and he cannot participate in my show, but he comes for moral support and because he will write an article about the tour afterwards. I empty everything possible from my bags: books — most importantly the history of Kosovo I am reading — but also papers, notes and most of my CDs (I don't want customs problems on top of everything else). It is a routine I am familiar with from crossing borders in Central America a decade ago. I pare down to the laptop computers, spare socks and underwear, and a toothbrush. Richard insists he will go to the Yugoslav Embassy in Budapest in the morning to try to get a visa one last time. Everything is tense. Our idea is to take the train to Novi Sad, then connect with a car to take us to Belgrade.

At the border things are even more tense. Team after team of customs officials, immigration officials, police and soldiers pass through the car, asking to see our passports for the fourth time, our tickets for the third time, our visas for the fifth time, and so forth. After nearly an hour's wait and no serious problem, the train lurches forward

and we are heading into the final remains of Yugoslavia, thinking we are in the clear.

Wrong. Two very large and aggressive Serbian police enter the car and stop squarely in front of us. They want my passport. They want to know what I am doing in Yugoslavia. They want to go through my bags, item by item. There is not much to look at. For some reason they are not interested in the laptops. Even more surprisingly they are not interested in the CDs, which are usually the touchy issue at borders. But these are police, not customs officials. Which is fine by me. A quarter of the CDs are from my new mix *PantyChrist*, a topic I did not want to get into with the cops.

They are done with me. I breathe a sigh of relief, but then they turn to Jozef. Since Jozef is travelling with me, he is also under suspicion. Typically, a Slovakian travelling into Yugoslavia would not attract much attention, so Jozef did not pack his bags with the expectation they would be searched by Milosevic's police. But now he is travelling with an American. And in his bag, it turns out, is a cornucopia of modern art stuff. Jozef and the cop discuss the contents of his bag in extremely broken English.

The police are Serb and for now they have everything in hand. They don't like minorities, and they particularly don't like the idea of foreign intellectuals stirring up the local minorities. Not that Jozef is going to stir anyone up. Jozef's work is all about absurdity and impossibility, about Andy Warhol and pianos in ashtrays. But these subtleties are beyond our policeman, who is looking increasingly unhappy.

Finally, the police are gone, and Jozef and I relax. OK. I am in. The only American artist in Yugoslavia. Novi Sad is the capital of Vojvodina and our first destination. I need to get to Belgrade tonight, but there are no trains that far. The bridges have been blown up by NATO. I am to be picked up by car in Novi Sad and taken to Belgrade. After the Belgrade concert I will be driven back to perform in Novi Sad before finally leaving Yugoslavia.

But just as the train pulls into Novi Sad, the police are back. "You [pointing to me] and you [pointing to Jozef] must come with us to police station in Novi Sad." Without further discussion we are marched to the very back of the train. This is seriously not good in a rational sense. I am not afraid. My visa is in order. My invitations are in order. It is not credible that the Yugoslav government would find it in its interest to create an international incident over a visiting American musician. Nevertheless, I do not want to go to the police station in Novi Sad. I am feeling very alone. After all, not only did the US break diplomatic relations with Yugoslavia, there is hardly a Western embassy left in the country. If I am in trouble, there is no one to go to for help.

The one thing between us and the police station are the concert organisers who are to meet us at the train station. I hope they got the message that we were to be on this train. I hope they are on time. I hope I will recognise them. But when the train stops, we are led out the back door and into a dark area away from the small crowd on the platform. Just before disappearing into the darkness I blurt out that I need to tell the people who are waiting for us where we are going, and head off in the opposite direction toward the light and the voices, with the startled police following close behind.

"Bob Ostertag?" A face materialises out of the crowd. "Welcome. How are you?" "Fine, fine, just a small problem with the police." I answer, motoring to the goons following on my heels.

A short time later Jozef and I are seated in an Italian restaurant on the main square



of Novi Sad. Seated in a semi-circle facing us are Elba Vuletic, her technical director Arpad, and two other men. But Boris and Olya, who have arrived from Belgrade to pick us up, have been banished to their car. "Shouldn't we invite them in too?" I ask. "They have nothing to do with this," Elba responds. "They are just drivers." So for the next hour, while Jozef and I warm up over cappuccino, Boris and Olya freeze outside in their unheated Yugo. Apparently the bad blood between Belgrade and Novi Sad extends even to cultural organisers in the opposition. Elba looks me in the eye and in an icy voice says: "So do you really think you have anything to teach us about the bombing?"

It dawned on me this is less a friendly cup of coffee than an interrogation, by five very angry people who want to know why the hell I am there and what I have to say for myself. They watch my every move, my every twitch. I try to explain: I am not there to teach anyone anything. I was opposed to the bombing. I have written a piece about the bombing I want to perform for them.

It is heavy going. In part they are testing me, probing this stranger in a place where no one visits. And in part they are, in some very small way, starting to soil their guts about the horrors they have recently gone through, and which they have had no chance to share with anyone who did not go through it with them.

People in Vojvodina (the northern region of Serbia) certainly have reason to be angry. Vojvodina is Serbia's other multi-ethnic, formerly autonomous stronghold of opposition to Milosevic; yet NATO rained more bombs down on them than any other part of Serbia. Their once beautiful bridges now lie in the Danube blocking boat traffic. (A new locally produced postcard proclaims: "Novi Sad, where the Danube runs over the bridges.") No bridges were bombed in Belgrade. There, NATO hit the Ministry of Defence, the state television, and other military and political targets. In Novi Sad they hit the power plant, the oil refinery and the cigarette factory.

There were no militarily strategic targets in Novi Sad. Kosovo is in the south of Serbia. Vojvodina in the north, as far from the fighting and refugees as one can get. Not once in ten years has the region voted for Milosevic. Yet NATO had decided not to fight a war in Kosovo, but rather to bomb Milosevic into submission by destroying Serbia's industrial infrastructure: much of which happened to be in Novi Sad. We're talking about bombs which explode above ground, spreading magnetic junk specifically designed to take out major power installations. The war is over, but when the wind comes up the junk blows around and more damage ensues. All this is in the isolated and bankrupt Serbia of Slobodan Milosevic. There is no money to rebuild much of anything that was destroyed. The coming winter is going to be hard, which brings the Serbs face to face with a very harsh reality. There is no heat in Novi Sad, and the electricity is intermittent. The weather is not improving anyone's mood.

Finally, the two drivers from Belgrade have had enough of sitting in the cold. They come and rescue Jozef and I from our interrogation. We pile into the tiny Yugo with no heat or defrost, and speed into the night towards Belgrade. Olya, a thin, beautiful young woman who does not say a word, is driving. Boris, a tall stringbean of a man in his late twenties, does the back seat driving and talks non-stop. To get to Belgrade, Olya has to negotiate one of the scariest roads on which it has ever been my misfortune to travel. The highway to Belgrade was a grand idea that was never completed, as the Tito regime ran out of money in the 1980s. It was intended as a

four-lane divided highway, but only one side got built. Traffic in both directions now squeezes onto the same half. The oncoming traffic took one good lane, traffic going our way drove on what was intended to be the hard shoulder. The other traffic lane, between us, is used as a passing lane for cars going both directions. The result is a constant game of chicken that involves everyone on the road.

Major unrepaired potholes are everywhere, but do the holes and the soft shoulder make anyone slow down? Not in the slightest. The Serbs drive as if they were out on the German autobahn.

[On reaching Belgrade], before falling asleep at the hotel, Jozef and I exchange notes just long enough to agree on one thing: that in no case should Richard come to Serbia. I decide to call first thing in the morning to tell him to stay put.

## Monday 18 October: Heart of the beast

The new day brings a whirlwind of activity as different from what I had been through in Novi Sad as one could imagine. Despite everything, Belgrade is still a busy city, and no part of it is busier than the offices of Free B92 where I spend most of the day.

Free B92 is the only major independent media functioning in Serbia. It encompasses a radio station, a Website ([www.freeb92.net](http://www.freeb92.net)), and TV shows which are passed by video cassette among several local stations round the country. To an urban Western radical like myself, Free B92 is a sort of Stairway-LA. In a country run by a bona fide war criminal they fearlessly tell the truth. Their use of the internet is pioneering. The sophistication of their ideas about media, politics and culture is second to none. Their shows are very popular. People really listen to them. They're young, hip and good-looking. And they manage to mix real politics with playing real music. And we're not talking Pete Seeger or Tracy Chapman. We're talking my music, which gets no airplay at all in my home country.

Amazingly, they seem pretty excited about me too. Suddenly, I am transformed from obscure avant garde artist into minor celebrity. By the end of the day, I have done three television interviews, four radio interviews and one newspaper interview. Everywhere people seem somewhat incredulous. First that I have made it there at all. Second, that I wanted to come in the first place. Third that I have actually done my homework, and can discuss the break-up of Yugoslavia in a nuanced way.

People in Belgrade have a unique take on the war. They were not bombed as heavily as the people up north. Their direct experience of the war is limited to the long range missiles and bombs that fell. And the highly accurate and selective targeting of these weapons made that experience into something of a show. As it is explained to me: "If you were in a pub drinking a beer and a missile hit your car outside, you would just go on drinking."

But this almost artificial character of the war in Belgrade leads to the wildest conspiracy theories. Everyone has one. No intrigue is too far-fetched. On my first night in Belgrade the concert organisers take me to dinner. They explain to me how the war was like a theatrical phony war contrived by Milosevic and Clinton working in cahoots behind the scenes for their mutual advantage.

Now every night people march through downtown Belgrade to demand Milosevic's



resignation I accompany my friends from Free B92. Despite the reduced numbers from just a couple of weeks ago, there is still energy crackling in the cold night air. People whistle, boo, and shout slogans: "Sloba! Sloba!" "Saddam! Sloba! Saddam!" seems to be the one that touches the deepest nerve.

The march ends up at the square where the club will perform in sets, which bodes well for the turnout at the concert. I break off and go in to set up my instruments. I get a message that Richard is in Novi Sad. My heart sinks. Somehow he got a visa in Budapest and crossed the border (without the instruments, as I had hastily instructed). But there is no time to even think about this now. He is on his own.

I boot the two laptops, one for audio and one for video, and disaster strikes. In all the chaos and stress, I have completely lost track of the fact that the second laptop which until now has only been along as a backup, has not been turned on since its dramatic fall from the wall back in Koper. And in fact it is damaged. It doesn't boot properly and exhibits various kinds of erratic behaviour. With time winding down, I go through yet another round of extremely stressful last-minute hi-tech fiddling. Finally, the computer is in a state where at least some of the features of the software are working. Every time I reboot, the system manifests a new kind of weird behaviour, so if for any reason I have to reboot there is no assurance I will be able to get it working again. But as long as no one touches it, the concert should be OK.

Despite the fact there has been very little publicity since no one knew exactly when or if I would arrive, an overflow crowd arrives, boosted no doubt by the demonstration to say that I am nervous would be an understatement, but at least the nervous tension is picking me up out of the lethargy of my cold.

I go on and play an improvisation that the audience seems to be quite excited about. Then I do War Games, which is a disappointment. It may have been the tension, or the fatigue, or being sick, or the malfunctioning of the computer, but it is the worst version of the piece I have done. This, combined with the fact that it really was intended as the opening half for a finale that is absent, leaves me with a bitter taste about the show. But the audience is appreciative, and there are more TV and radio interviews to do.

The moment I finish the show another tall Serb strides across the stage and is in my face. "I tried so hard to forget about these things," he tells me, "and now you bring them all back."

"I hope I have not offended you," I reply.

"No. No, not at all," he responds. Thank you. Thank you very much." He warmly shakes my hand and turns and walks away.

## Tuesday 19 October: Back to Novi Sad

Up early in the morning and off for Novi Sad, with Olya again at the wheel of her beat-up car. Through the foggy windows, I perceive a disconcerting feature of the road I had missed in the darkness of night on my way in: the sides of the highway are strewn with the remains of numerous car wrecks.

In Novi Sad we find Richard having a very tough time of it with our hosts. Police pulled him from the train at the border for interrogation in a room somewhere in the train station. Where was he going? Why? Who was he meeting? And the cop kept asking if he

wanted a Yugoslavian dinner. Richard thought this was not a good sign, since at first they had told him it would only take a few minutes. But, being the exceedingly polite and open person that he is, he responded each time by saying, "Thank you, you are too kind, but I have sandwiches in my backpack." What Richard did not know was that the Yugoslav currency is the dinar. Evidently at some point it was determined that Richard was not a threat to the security of Yugoslavia and he was sent on his way.

When I arrive at the Cultural Centre, however, there is little time for catching up. The show is scheduled to start in just hours. I pull the laptops out, boot them up, and discover that the one that was dropped is functioning more erratically than ever. Time for more frantic computer fiddling. Eventually I decide that maybe the memory chips were knocked loose in the fall. Using only Richard's Swiss Army knife for a tool, we start dismantling the computer right there on the stage.

An exceedingly drunk Serb walks up on the stage, announces he is an artist, and watches our work. "What are you doing?"

"Trying to fix this computer. The situation is tense and time is running out. The last thing we want to do is humour this drunk but we are not sure how to make him go away. It's broken?"

"Yes." We are trying our best to ignore him.

"How?"

"Someone dropped it in Koper." He gets a wild light in his eye. He grabs our laptop by the screen and raises it over his head as if ready to smash it on the floor. "Well, if a Slovene broke it, hey I am a Serb. I should destroy it!"

"No, NO! Please put the computer down!"

"No, you don't understand," he leans at us. "If a Slovene broke it, then a Serb should really smash it to bits."

It is difficult to tell if he is really going to smash the computer on to the floor, but he is holding the thing by the lid and it is quite clear that his thumb is about to go right through the screen. The guy goes teetering about the stage with the computer over his head and Richard and I trailing pleading, "Please put the computer down."

We finally get the computer back and the man staggers off, but things do not improve. We coax and curse and blow on it and reboot over and over, but this computer is toast. I explain to Elza that we will not be able to do any part of Yugoslavia Suite. There are two options. I continue. I could do a concert of improvised music on the one working computer, or we can cancel the show.

Now the real trouble starts as it becomes clear who we are dealing with. It turns out that the man who first agreed to present the concert, an artist friend of Jozsef's, has left Novi Sad for Stockholm. He passed the job on to Elza, and Elza passed it on to the Cultural Centre. And the Cultural Centre staff are straight out of central casting for the role of Balkan bureaucrats for a Hollywood B-movie. They never smile. They are stern and seem constantly annoyed. More importantly, they do not seem to understand why we are here, they don't like us, and they certainly don't trust us.

Arpad, our new contact at the Centre, decides we will postpone the concert until tomorrow night. This makes no sense at all. The computer is not going to fix itself overnight, and in any case we are scheduled to leave the next morning. But the decision is made, we ask the audience to come back the next night, and soon Richard



and I am upstairs in the office in another meeting that feels more like an interrogation. Arpad doesn't actually believe that the computer is broken. He finds our whole project fishy and keeps asking us why we do not want to do the concert. Eventually he announces that overnight they will find us another computer. I try explaining that this is far-fetched. The computer we have is quite fast, stuffed with an extraordinary amount of memory, and includes special video hardware I am sure he cannot find in Yugoslavia. Arpad produces Sinsia Sremac, a chunky fellow of about 25 who's got "hustler" coming out of everyone. Sinsia produces a cellphone, and announces that with a quick call he can produce any computer I wish for. I give him the list of our requirements. After a few phone calls, he admits it may take a bit longer, but promises he will have it in the morning. I reiterate my view that we are on a wild goose chase, but refusing their offer and heading for the train station does not seem to be a realistic option.

Off we go to an uneasy dinner. I spend most of my time conversing with Elza, whom I am starting to warm to. As much as everyone hates Milošević, it is difficult to engage them in a real way. Nothing bad happened in Kosovo, they are quite sure. As for Bosnia, Elza flatly declares that "ethnic cleansing never happened." It is disconcerting to hear such a statement from an obviously bright and well-informed person.

Richard and I go to bed in a hotel which, like everywhere else in Now Sad, has no heat and no hot water. We are counting the minutes until we can leave Now Sad. The problem is that we don't know when this will be.

## Wednesday 20 October: Culture jamming

Back at the Cultural Centre in the morning, Sinsia reports that he cannot get the video hardware we need (surprise). He is shocked there is a computer even he cannot get, and has ordered one just to prove to himself and anyone who will listen that he can get it. But it will take three days at the earliest to arrive.

Just when Richard and I think we are off the hook, Arpad and Sinsia announce Plan B: they will repair our computer. I try to explain that this is the latest model Apple laptop, that we have already checked to see if the memory is loose, and that what really needs to happen is that it should be sent back to Apple.

Our hosts take this as an insult: "We Americans do not understand the industriousness of Now Sad — how people here learn to make do with little, and to make the most of the little they have. 'We have really good hackers here in Now Sad,' Sinsia counters. 'Just give me your computer. In three hours I will bring it back working.' There is no way I am going to let this shirk walk off with my computer, so soon Sinsia, Arpad, Richard and I are packed into a car racing across Now Sad to hacker central.

The room is full of computers, very late model ones at that. A laptop like ours (minus the video input) is sitting on a table. "Nice computer," I comment. "Yeah, it was stolen in Germany," Sinsia replies (he is joking). I don't think so.

And then we meet the hackers. The hackers are worth the wait. These are serious kids, doing amazing things. So amazing, in fact, that they have to promise not to discuss their work with anyone. Despite their skills, of course they cannot fix my computer. But Arpad is unconvinced. Back in the car and off to another hacker joint we go.

Finally, it is late in the day. We are back in the office at the Cultural Centre, and I am facing the same interrogation team I was facing last night. Arpad has finally got it: the computer is broken. It is not a trick. I am not faking it. There is no subterfuge. It just got dropped by a drunk Slovenian rock star.

I repeat what I said last night: that I can do an improvised music concert, or we can cancel the whole thing. I remind him that we are doing this for no money, not even travel expenses. I add that I am a composer, with 14 CDs of my music released, and that video is a recent addition to a career of mostly improvised music.

Arpad crosses his arms, leans back, squints his eyes, and in the iciest tone he can muster, says, "What kind of music?"

People have been asking me this question since I was in junior high school, and I have never found a satisfactory answer. "Avant garde?" Too academic. "Experimental?" Not really. "Computer music?" I hate computer music. Later I have settled on "Unpopular," but I don't think Arpad would get it. So I hand him a CD. "Listen for yourself."

Finally Arpad decides I should play an audience about half the size of the previous night comes. We explain the situation. I play. Before the concert Arpad insists on coming on stage to tell me the way I am setting up my software and sound is completely wrong.

At this point I sort of snap. I mean, I wrote this software. What is he talking about?

After the concert I grab Elza and tell her we need to talk. She is the one person in Now Sad I feel any real connection with, and I have actually come to like her a lot. She takes me into her office and I let it all loose.

"Elza, you gotta cut us some slack. There are millions of Americans, and Richard and I are the only ones that came here. We've studied the politics, made this concert, got the visas, and asked for no money, just to show some art and have some kind of a dialogue. But you all haven't trusted us since the moment we got here. You don't believe us when we say the computer is broken, you watch us. I told you from the beginning that trying to fix this was a waste of time. And now Arpad tries to tell me how to use my own software."

I go for broke. "And as long as I am telling you what I think, I gotta say I think ethnic cleansing happened. You are a smart, well-informed and honest person. I respect your opinion. But I have done my research too and it happened. It was very real and very very bad."

Elza doesn't flinch. She speaks very quietly. She explains the Centre people have been bothering her too, but since she technically does not work for them there is little she can do.

"But if you really knew the computer was broken," she asks, "why did you go along with all this effort to fix it?"

"Elza, think about it. No one believed me. I honestly didn't know what would happen if I had announced we were leaving."

"Bob, you don't understand the Serb mentality. If that is what you really thought you should have said so, and told them, if you don't believe me, I am going to drop 17 more Tomahawk missiles on your heads!"

"Elza, you know I couldn't do that!"

She knows. "And as for ethnic cleansing," she adds, "maybe I am not as well-informed as you think I am."

We talk more. She tells me she is actually Croatian, but married to a Serb. I note that Croatian forces were guilty of crimes as heinous as the Serbs. She asks me to send her any good documentation I have on ethnic cleansing. I feel very close to Elza, a very good person in a tough situation.

## Thursday 21 October: Departure

We finally leave Serbia. Richard is so happy I think he might break into song. I am mostly feeling tired and sick, but I am looking forward to hot water. When I think back to how Elza had one position on ethnic cleansing when in the presence of the men from the Cultural Centre, and another one in private, I decide it was fortunate that we were unable to perform *Yugoslavia Suite* in Now Sad, and probably even in Belgrade. A project like ours assumes the existence of a minimal amount of political space necessary to have the dialogue the art is about. In Serbia, that space did not appear to exist.

## Epilogue

I have now performed *Yugoslavia Suite* many times around Western Europe and North America. It turns out that, given appropriate conditions, it is an easy show to mount. And using lessons learned in the Balkans, we have managed to get the gear down to one box, and the promoters only provide a sound system and video projector.

Milošević is out. Activists from Free B92 were at the heart of the movement that toppled him, and continue to play a key role in the still-turbulent political life in Serbia. A concert I did in France wiped my fee to my bank back home, and police authorities impounded it as possibly violating the economic embargo because it said it was for *Yugoslavia Suite*. Sinsia Sremac didn't seem to have any such problems. A few months ago, the master hustler called me up in San Francisco. Despite embargo and all, he was in my city trying to work some deal about gene-based medicine.

I haven't sent Elza any materials on ethnic cleansing. She is quite Internet-savvy, and there is documentation all over the Web when she is ready to find it. I do send her greetings from time to time, and think of her quite fondly.

And of course, I sent everyone heartfelt congratulations on the incredible fall of Milošević. Bob Ostertag's Website is at [www.detroit.net/ostertag](http://www.detroit.net/ostertag).



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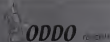
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# the primer

A bi-monthly series in which we offer a user's guide to the recordings of some of our favourite musicians. This month, Edwin Pouncey takes a duck stab at unravelling the music and the mystery of Californian conceptualists **The Residents**. Illustration: Savage Pencil

After nearly three decades of a musical career that has gone through many creative tremors and upheavals, San Francisco's most famous avant-rock (non-) group The Residents are still standing. By sticking fast to their original master plan of refusing to be identified or interviewed so that their personalities would not interfere with the music, they have skilfully avoided being absorbed into a mainstream which, after several attempts to swallow their music, has repeatedly spat them out again. The Residents are proud not to be considered cool. Throughout their 30-year history a gigantic body of material has been amassed, numerous recordings made and a succession of elaborate and outlandish shows has been toured and staged around the world. And all this work has been attributed to four unknown performers masking their real identities behind bloodshot eyeball disguises.

The origin of The Residents also remains a mystery. It has been suggested that they were raised in the relatively unmapped backwater town of Shreveport, Louisiana, the last place to keep the "Reese" Confederate flag flying during the American Civil War. Early musical influences on The Residents' musical gumbo include R&B, James Brown's *Live At The Apollo LP*, Captain Beefheart, Frank Zappa, Sun Ra and Harry Partch. Once settled in the San Mateo district of San Francisco, they began making music together on a collection of found instruments and tape recorders. Samples of these edited tapes — later titled *Rusty Coathangers For The Doctor* and *The Balled Q' Stuff'd Trigger*, but never released — were apparently sent to a few friends back in Louisiana, who wrote back asking if they could manage the group by setting up a team called the Cryptic Corporation.

In 1971 a demo tape was sent to Hal Halenstadt, a marketing director at Warner Brothers who had worked alongside one of their heroes, Captain Beefheart. Hoping that Halenstadt would lend a sympathetic ear to their anonymously sent tape, they were surprised but secretly pleased when it was rejected and returned to them several months later addressed to "The Residents". Warner's may have shown the budding group the door, but they had unwittingly supplied them with their name — it was definitely an improvement on the one they had been toying with: The New Beatles.

Also on board during this early period were UK

guitarist Philip "Snakefinger" Lithman and the mythical, "mysterious" N. Senada — whose obscure "Theory of Phonetic Organisation" musical concept was, according to Residents biographer Ian Shirley, "in reality a smoke screen to cover up The Residents' lack of proficiency as musicians". Together they made *Bobby Sox*, an early live recording from a gig at the Boarding House in San Francisco which has never been released in its entirety.

The Residents' later obsession with new technology would change their musical and performance ideas considerably. After years of steadily punching out their product on vinyl through their own Ralph Records, they were among the first independent labels to embrace the CD revolution. They have also released a laserdisc (*Twenty Twisted Questions*) and a series of CD-ROMs (*Frank Show*, *Bad Day On The Midway* and *Gnorphead Man*). These activities underline the fact that the group are forever looking forward. Well, almost: the next Residents project is a DVD retrospective compilation called *Idly Flx*, featuring old, new and restored material, together with new recordings of classic Residents songs and 30 minutes of new animation. An *Idly Flx* US tour has also been announced, starting in mid-February. Although they would probably squirm at the comparison, The Residents' musical approach is closest to that of fellow San Franciscan rock legends The Grateful Dead, in that both share a passion for experimentation and tireless showmanship, have a wide-ranging musical repertoire, and boast a substantial, uncompromising artistic legacy. Both groups have also suffered the loss of their lead guitarist (Snakefinger and Jerry Garcia). Unfortunately for The Dead, the death of Garcia forced them off the road, whereas The Residents' equally long, strange trip shows no sign of terminating just yet.

## The Residents

**Refused: The Pilgrimage Of Santa Dog Through The Second Millennium**  
(Ralph America no number CD)

In 1972, after failing to secure a record deal with Warner Brothers, The Residents set up their own label, Ralph, to manufacture and distribute their records. The first of these was *Santa Dog*, an ambitious double 45

package which came in an elaborate hand-printed gatefold sleeve, based on a found photograph of a dachshund kitschily attired in a Santa Claus costume. Out of the initial run of 500 copies, only 400 complete sets were made up due to cover damage. Most of them were sent out to friends and various record companies, although two copies were personalised and mailed to Frank Zappa and President Richard Nixon respectively. Both were returned. Zappa had changed his address, while Nixon's copy was sent back with "Refused" stamped over it. Undaunted by its lukewarm response, The Residents have continued to work on their *Santa Dog* creation over the years. In its latest incarnation, it has mutated from a yapping, experimental "Jesus foetus" into a fully orchestrated hellhound that rears up on two legs and walks like a man.

The music that fills the four sides of the original *Santa Dog* — "Fire", "Explosion", "Lightning" and "Aircraft Damage" — was primarily composed on tape recorders under the fictional pseudonyms Ivory And The Brancatores, Delta Nudes, The College Walkers and Art & Ormeiga. The resulting clust of Zappaesque freaky surrealism, avant garde Cagney construction and playfully shamolic, raw musical energy produced one of the Residents' most unforgettable creations, whose bark was as bit as vicious as its bite.

This latest, definitive collection reveals the fascinating (and at times extremely disturbing) evolution of their mythical musical beast over the period 1972–99. Its most recent incarnation howls even fiercer and stranger than when it was first heard 28 years ago.

**Whatever Happened To Vileness Fats?**  
(East Side Digital ESD80592 CD)

Rather than simply starting work on another record after *Santa Dog*, it was decided that the group should also embark on a massive film project called *Vileness Fats* (later changed to *Fats*). A proposed 14-hour "musical comedy love story set in a world of one-armed midgets" concerning "the schizophrenic struggles of a one-armed midget who is both religious leader and social outcast" in his own community" and the "love triangle between both sides of a schizophrenic character and an Indian princess". The initial (uncompleted) script idea of *Vileness Fats* mirrors, albeit distortedly, the basic plot of Flannery O'Connor's novel





Weird beard: Santa Dog 78

Wise Blood, which pursues a similar theme of a misunderstood holy man. Being The Residents, however, all resemblance between O'Connor's tortured creation and their own cracked vision soon part company as they introduce a curious cast of characters and props including Weecosa the Indian priestess, Mom and her schizophrenic cowboy son Steve/Lonesome Jack, a Siamese Twin wrestling tag team called Art and Omega (after one of the fictional groups featured on *Santa Dog*), atomic shopping carts some giant broccoli, and a bevy of one-armed madgets (to make the sets look larger).

The Residents worked for four years on the film in their cramped Sycamore Street studio in San Francisco. They built their own hand-painted sets and asked friends to help out as extras. Lighting and direction assistance came from a film school student called Graeme Whiffler, who would later direct their promotional films. Using half-inch black and white video tape and primitive equipment—so that, like audio tape, they could wind it backwards and forwards—the results proved to be disappointing. The project was finally abandoned in February 1976. The myth that *Wolven Fats* evoked, however, was absorbed into the legend surrounding the group's early days, and various stills were later tantalizingly exhibited on the covers of their records as proof of its existence.

In 1984 the *Wolven Fats* footage was resurrected and a 32-minute version—which features a nightclub (Wilf's Hot Spot) scene showing the Siamese Twin wrestling tag team in a fight to the death—with themselves—was prepared and released, together with an accompanying soundtrack album of newly scored music. Its most historically interesting track is "Broccoli And Saxophone", which incorporates the lyrics for "Blouse", a song originally intended for the unreleased *Baby Sex* album. Here the full surreal roar and alien craziness of the group's earliest music boils over, as a Resident howls madly in the dark over a stabbing synth line and a dislocated saxophone squealing like a stuck pig. As an exercise in uneasy listening and viewing, *Whatever Happened To Wolven Fats?* is essential.

## Meet The Residents (East Side Digital ESD81222 CD)

Released on April Fool's Day 1974, *The Residents'* first album proper was issued in an edition of 1050 copies, wrapped in a sleeve that shamelessly mocked The Beatles by 'antiscally' altering the *Meet The Beatles* cover to read *Meet The Residents*, complete with suitably defaced Fab Four mugshots. This was perhaps the most famous of their several satirical stabs at the group. On the insert for their 1976 *The Third Reich 'N' Roll* album the question was posed in block letters "Why Do The Residents Hate The Beatles?", and later in 1977 they remodelled a random medley of the group's greatest hits for the A side of their mischievous (but fantastic) *The Residents Play The Beatles And The Beatles Play The Residents'* 45. The music on *Meet The*

*Residents*, however, is nothing like the tuneful pop harmonies of their targets. Instead, the sounds that greeted anyone who dared to buy the record belonged to no pop outfit on earth. Unlike the musical deconstruction that rattled through the sonic kernel of *Santa Dog*, these songs are more fully composed. Elements of James Brown, Easy Listening, avant garde jazz, garage psychedelia and even high opera bounce off each other to create an alternative music-box of tricks that shifts from the buzzsaw guitar attack of "Smiley Tongues" to the early Sun Ra ambience of "Seasoned Greetings." It climaxes with a touching, hushed choral chant that pays subliminal homage to the hordes of American youth who became casualties of the Vietnam War.

Despite an advertising campaign that included giving away 4000 copies of a special flexidisc sampler of the



The Residents, pre-eyeball days



Publicity shot from *Meet The Residents*

album in a Canadian art magazine called *File*. *Meet The Residents* proved slow to shift. In the first year, it sold only a handful of copies. Deemed unlistenable by the media, The Residents were seemingly doomed to languish in obscurity. Meanwhile, the minuscule but devoted following gradually gathering around them eagerly awaited their next move.

#### Not Available

(*Essé Side Digital ESDB1232 CD*)

In an act of almost Dadaistic defiance towards their fledgling audience, The Residents recorded their second album in 1974 and decided not to release it until they had forgotten it ever existed. Aptly illustrating their "Theory of Obscurity", it was the first in a series of publicity grabbing stunts culminating years later in 1986, when one of the group's famous eyeball heads was reported stolen at a gig at the Hollywood Palace, Los Angeles. (It was duly replaced with a skull, which proved to be a solemn token of mourning, memento mori and cleverly stage managed switch of identity, which can be loosely linked to their earliest publicity shots where they appeared dressed in hooded newspaper costumes in front of a bass drum on which a similar looking skull had been balanced.)

When The Residents' Cryptic Corporation management team finally released *Not Available* in 1978 — allegedly as a stopgap to fill the void left behind by the controversial non-appearance of *Eskimo* (see below) — it clearly showed just how far they had developed since their first album. Instead of a set of strange songs performed in a variety of eccentric styles, the more ambitious *Not Available* displays The Residents' growing confidence in the recording studio. Described as "A short opera in four parts, which concerns a central character named Edeenee, and the effect she has on the lives of the men around her", parts of the album were made up from music borrowed from the original soundtrack to *Weren't Fats*. Rather than sounding like a hastily assembled collection of outtakes, however, *Not Available* is a progressive spurt forwards, the haunting and somewhat worrying "She's

A 'Going Down' being just one example of its undeniable power and presence. By finally releasing this forgotten album, The Residents had given those critics who still thought they were nothing more than a novelty act something substantial to chew on.

#### The Third Reich 'N' Roll

(*Euro Ralph 003 CD*)

When asked by a curious San Francisco journalist in 1979 why he thought The Residents disliked The Beatles so much, Cryptic Corporation officer Hardy Fox quietly denied it. "[The Residents] respect and honour them, because The Beatles were the first band to give up live performing and create within the studio," Fox explained. Unfortunately the worshipful devotion bestowed upon the group by their fans and the media eventually caused The Residents to rebel against them. In their eyes the seemingly innocent mop-tops had

suddenly transformed into "controllers of the culture".

"They wanted to honour The Beatles," Fox insisted, but they also wanted to kick out the jams."

With the release of their third album *The Third Reich 'N' Roll* in 1975, The Residents did just that, looking out at the Top 40 rock 'n' roll culture which had created The Beatles by regurgitating a selection of avant garde arrangements of 30 songs from the early to mid-60s. Somewhere in the dense, jumbled grind can be recognised Residents versions of such classics as The Surfers' "Wipe Out", ? & The Mysterians' "96 Tears" and The Beatles' "Hey Jude", all crunched together to form two suites — *Swastikas On Parade* and *Hitler Was A Vegetarian* — designed to sound familiar and totally alien at the same time. Complete with a cover that shows a cartoon Dick Clark (host of popular pop TV show *American Bandstand*) sporting a Nazi uniform and holding a carrot (a visual pun which, according to the group, represents the bat Clark used to lure the herds of unsuspecting American youth into his cultural glue factory). The chaotic end result peels out the death knell for corporate rock, and acts as an alarm call to rouse such future plunderphonics/tumble composers as John Oswald, Christian Marclay and Otomo Yoshihide into action.

Even more intense, however, was the group's treatment of The Rolling Stones' "I Can't Get No Satisfaction", which they brutally murdered and dismembered with guitarist Snakefinger releasing the still-switching remains as a limited edition 45 in 1976 (it is currently available on Rykodisc's *He! compilation*). The idea here was to condense all *The Third Reich 'N' Roll*'s energy into one song — a final burst of unfettered creative rage demonstrating their total contempt for Top 40 radio. When punk happened a couple of years later, The Residents found themselves rubbing shoulders with such California hardcore outbats as The

Video still from *Third Reich 'N' Roll*



Back off or the bird gets it: Duck Stab



Dead Kennedys, The Avengers and Crime. To show off their punk icons, "Satisfaction" was reissued in yellow vinyl and... much to their astonishment and delight, shifted 30,000 copies, ironically almost giving The Residents Top 40 status themselves.

#### Fingerprince/Babyfingers (Euro Ralph 017 CD)

The spirit of fellow Californian experimental composer Harry Patch can be discerned on The Residents' fourth album. Originally titled *Tournaquet Of Roses* and planned as a three-sided LP, much of the material on *Fingerprince* (released in 1976, the year of Patch's death) came from the *Nor Available* sessions, some of it dating back as far as 1972. For economic reasons the original plan was dropped and the album came out as a regular two-sided LP. Side one was made up of songs (the two versions of "You Yesyesyes" being particularly memorable), while the whole of side two consisted of "Six Things To A Cycle", a shortened piece for a ballet that had apparently been commissioned by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art but was never performed. Here the twin influences of Patch and Indonesian gamelan are introduced through the utilisation of a variety of regular, found and self-constructed instruments to produce a single piece of "contemporary classical music". Like a Patch composition, it is exploratory, spiritual and courageously ungendered.

Their obvious obsession with the music and ideas of Harry Patch has subliminally resurged through the years, particularly in the group's elaborately costumed

and choreographed shows, which have a similar feel to Patch's 50s and 60s stagings of his experimental operatic dramas *Oedipus*, *The Bewitched and Delusion Of The Fury*.

The previously abandoned third side of *Fingerprince* was eventually released in 1981 as a limited edition EP called *Babyfingers* by The Residents' short-lived official fanclub, WEIRD. Here on the Patch-like track "Death In Barstow", the group salutes and bids farewell to one of their greatest musical idols, whose influence continues to haunt their work.

#### Duck Stab/Buster & Glen (Euro Ralph 007/008 2XCD)

In 1976 The Residents began work on *Eskimo*, an album which would become entangled in mystery and controversy in the three years before it was eventually released. While the world waited for *Eskimo*, the group put out a couple of EPs, beginning with *Duck Stab*. But because the EP format was too small to accommodate its playing time of 16 minutes, they decided to shift *Duck Stab* to side one of an LP and fill side two with the songs they had already prepared for *Buster & Glen*, the second EP of the planned series. The *Duck Stab/Buster & Glen* LP received much airplay and by 1986 over 40,000 copies were in circulation. The reason for the record's success is mainly due to its unashamed accessibility. Although such songs as "Blue Rosebuds", "Constantinople", "Bach Is Dead", "Hello Skunk" and "The Executioner" could only have been penned by The Residents, the eccentric pop feeling pulsing through them is less frantic, more engrossing and leisurely

paced than before. The words to the songs are also meticulously chosen and recited, allowing what one critic described as a "hallucinogenic Walt Disney" effect to subtly invade the listener's subconscious. The Residents returned to this winning formula on the *Commercial Album*. But not before they pulled the long-awaited *Eskimo* out of its creative deep freeze.

#### Eskimo (Euro Ralph 0016 CD)

At the time, *Eskimo* was The Residents' most ambitious idea: a single atmospheric sound piece in six parts which tells a series of stories based on Eskimo culture. The idea behind the project was to transport their audience into "Eskimoland" using a sound association process, where the listener was asked to read the texts on the album jacket while playing the record until an imaginary vowel link began to form. This means "it insisted the group's press department, 'that instead of listening to *Eskimo*, one actually sees *Eskimo* once the proper mental associations have been made." To help successfully create this hallucination in sound, The Residents drafted in the services of Snakefinger, Henry Row drummer Chris Cutler and ex-Mother Of Invention Don Preston on synthesizer, together with spiritual/creative guidance from the legendary, 'mysterious' N. Senada, a shadowy figure dating back to the group's earliest days, who allegedly showed up at the studio brandishing a thermos flask filled with Arctic air, insisting that they should get it on tape.

Equally amusing and baffling were the list of fictional ceremonial instruments supposedly used on the album. These included such Patchian names and descriptions as "Kooka - a plucked string instrument made of seal gut stretched over a dog skull sounding board" and a set of drums called *Segook*, *Amorak*, *Oolusak* and *Atseak*, which were "made by stretching skins over skulls, rib cages, etc." Building up their own myths around the *Eskimo* project enabled The Residents to visualise it more clearly, thus making what had originally been their individual take on World Music into a viable composition. It also reflected the plight of the real Polar Eskimos who, as explained in the sleeve notes, have since been "rescued" from their "miserable lifestyle" and relocated into government housing, where they spend their days "watching reruns on TV".

The publicity scam which built up during the year prior to *Eskimo*'s release in October 1979 was almost as complex as the music itself. According to the group, their Cryptic Corporation management team insisted that they should hand over the *Eskimo* tapes, so that they could release the record as soon as possible. A late night listening session, however, revealed that the album still needed more work. This decision caused them to (mysteriously) fly to London with the tapes where they were counselled by Chris Cutler. The tapes were then slashed in a bank vault until The Residents felt they could trust their

(management) Enraged at their behaviour, the Cryptics (justed down and released the *Not Available* tapes to compensate for the delay. Eventually, with Cutler acting as a go-between, Cryptic Corporation officers John Kennedy and Jay Clem flew on a "peace mission" to London, where the tapes were finally handed over. Back home, the group was rewarded with a new recording studio where, in a burst of creative enthusiasm, they produced *Buster & Glen, Santa Dog 78* and finished off *Ekmo*.

The end result is astonishing. *Ekmo* is an epic sonic landscape, where icebergs of sound smash together while a synthesized blizzard rages around the too-hatted, tribal-chanting Residents, whose heads have now been replaced by giant, all-seeing eyeballs. The scam paid off: an astounding 100,000 copies of *Ekmo* were sold, making it their best-selling record. Fired by their success, they rush-released a tongue-in-cheek 12" disco 45 version called "Diskomo", which slightly tarnished the brilliance of the original.

#### The Commercial Album (Euro Ralph 70 CD)

After *Ekmo* established their oddball reputation and eyeball image worldwide, The Residents proceeded to move forwards and backwards simultaneously. The

*Commercial Album* (1980) was made up of 40 one-minute songs, a kaleidoscopic distillation of their compositional and lyrical prowess which built on the ideas they had experimented with on *Duck Stab*, *Buster & Glen*. Although both the title and the back cover design—showing the song titles laid out in the style of a jukebox selection—smack of self-mockery, an alternative title for the album could easily have been *The Residents Top 40*. Each song was recorded regardless of length and then, using a stopwatch, edited down to 60 seconds. Altering tape speeds also helped in getting the completed songs down to their required time limit. Various special guest musicians assisted on this series of musical vignettes, including Snakefinger, Chris Cutler, guitarist Fred Frith (who would later record for Ralph Records with Cutler as a member of The Art Bears, and as a solo artist) and Andy Partridge of English neo-psychedelists XTC. To promote *The Commercial Album*, they made four promos called *The One Minute Movies*, directed by The Residents and Graeme Whifler, which added an even keener surreal edge to the project. The best of these was *Maxxore*, which shows an alien autopsy taking place while the group sway, Fred Astaire style, in front of the camera, intercut with a ridiculous shot of a Resident jerking going through the throes of performing a guitar solo.

#### Mark Of The Mole (East Side Digital ESD80272 CD)

#### Intermission (East Side Digital ESD81312 CD)

#### The Tunes Of Two Cities (East Side Digital ESD81302 CD)

#### The Big Bubble (East Side Digital ESD80342 CD)

By the early 80s, The Residents were considered a hat by the majority of the "New Wave" music press, more concerned in discovering the individuals lurking behind those eyeball masks, than with discussing their music. To deal with the anger, frustration and confusion they felt at the time, they decided to record an album that they could eventually take on tour. That record was *Mark Of The Mole*, the first part of a planned trilogy about two disparate societies at war with each other: the primitive, working-class Moles and the sophisticated, superficial Chubs. Inspired by tales of the Great Depression (Steinbeck's *The Grapes Of Wrath* being one major influence), *MO7H* was also a personal work for The Residents, since they too, like the thousands of poor farmers before them, were forced to leave behind

PHOTO TOP LEFT: JEFFREY MAYER

Eyeball to eyeball: The Residents nod out



## the primer

the creative dustbowl of their home state and move to California to eke out a living. The songs on *Mole* and *The Tunes Of Two Cities* were composed on a (then) state of the art sampler called an Emulator, which allowed them to paint on a much larger sonic canvas than before and almost completely dispense with regular instrumentation.

*The Mole Show* would prove to be The Residents' most elaborate and money draining exercise to date. Unlike a regular rock show, its creators insisted on a more theatrical production which included special lighting, huge painted backdrops, giant cut-out Mole and Chub figures, a dance troupe and a narrator, magician Penn Jillette (of Penn and Teller fame). Although *The Mole Show* was a success in California, their decision to take it to Europe proved to be a disaster. Problems with surly UK roadies, illness, an attack on Jillette from the audience in Spain, coupled with the spiraling cost of keeping the tour rolling, left The Residents broke and feeling even more frustrated than before. However, their recordings from this period feature some of their best work since *Exile*, especially on *The Tunes Of Two Cities*, a mostly instrumental album of artfully induced big band jazz tunes and B-movie science fiction film themes powered by the same kind of otherworldly thinking and playing that Sun Ra and his Arkestra used to belt out in the early 60s. Also notable

is intermission, the music piped out during the interval of *The Mole Show* with the intention of "grabbing people's interest, holding their attentions during the break, and then giving them something to think about as they left."

In 1985 the group released *The Big Bubble*, another episode of their *Mole Trilogy*. Perversely, however, this was not the third and final part but the fourth. The Residents also announced that the project had been extended into six parts with parts three, five and six due sometime in the future. Unfortunately, *The Big Bubble's* main attraction for many was its cover, a photograph of four actors in white tuxedos who both fans and press (wrongly) assumed were The Residents unmasked. Alas, it was only another desperate hoax to prop up what was really just another bunch of strange songs. The Residents' bubble had seemingly burst. What they learnt from the *Mole Trilogy/Show* experience, however, became the recording and performance template for future multi-faceted projects such as *God In Three Persons* (Euro Ralph 022), *CUBE E: The History Of American Music In 3 E-Z Pieces* (deleted), *Break Show* (Euro Ralph 006) and their most recent epic *Wormwood: Curious Stories From The Bible* (Euro Ralph 019) where The Residents prise open the Good Book and discover, to their delight, that it is crawling with juicy maggots.

misplaced, only half-successful combination. The *Souls* side is a disgraceful jumble, but the Hank Williams side still sounds fine, an unashamedly commercial reworking of his greatest hits which actually spawned a European dancefloor hit with "Kaw Liga". Hank's mercilessly catchy song about a wooden Indian who falls in love. Opening up with a riff that cheekily samples Michael Jackson's "Billie Jean" — a reference to William's wife, who bears the same name — is the sound of The Residents thoroughly enjoying themselves. The third in the series was supposed to have been *The Trouble With Harry's* (ie. Parth and Nilsson), but by now CD technology had kicked in and The Residents had lost interest in making LPs. As the original idea was to interpret a different composer on each side of a vinyl LP, the project abruptly had the plug pulled. The only surviving fragment from the abandoned American Composer Series to see the light of day was a fabulous version of Sun Ra's "Space Is The Place", which The Residents contributed to *Wavelength Infinity*, a various artists tribute to Sun Ra's Arkestra released on Rastaban. On the strength of this powerfully cosmic rendition — which exhibits a perfect understanding of the man and his music — fans can only hope that they find the time and inclination to return to Ra one day to finish what they started.

**Residue Deux**  
(East Side Digital ESDB1322 CD)

**Our Finest Flowers**  
(Euro Ralph 007 CD)

These two notable compilations feed the fan and invite the newcomer into the weird, wild and wiggly world of The Residents. *Residue Deux* is made up of rare tracks from their early days and beyond. *Our Finest Flowers* celebrates the group's "Twenty Long Dreary Years of Obscure Stardom" with an impressive "rognification" of their greatest hits. Residents devotees can spend hours of fun trying to recognise the original songs in their new skins, all of which have been stitched up and newly baptised with such titles as "Six Amber Thangs", "Perfect Goat" and "Be Kind To U-Web Footed Friends" (a Sousa styled salute to their now-defunct Uncle Willie's Eyeball Buddies (andub)). For those who are simply curious to discover what all the fuss is about, *Our Finest Flowers* is an excellent (albeit disjointed) collection of Residents curios which — together with the more formal pair of Rykodisc compilations *Heaven?* and *Hell?* (Rykodisc 20012 and 20013 CDs) — urges all who listen to dig deeper. Buy or die!

**Snakefinger**  
*Chewing Hides The Sound*  
(East Side Digital ESDB1392 CD)

**Greener Pastures**  
(East Side Digital ESDB1402 CD)

Mention must also be made of the late LK

Snakefinger

**George & James**  
(Euro Ralph 002 CD)

**Stars & Hank Together**  
(East Side Digital ESDB1492 CD)

These two albums form the only existing part of the American Composer Series, another grand Residential design which was never completed. The plan was to record and release ten LPs during the final 16 years of the 20th century, featuring The Residents' interpretations of the music of 20 different American composers throughout history. Suggested combinations for other records in the series included Allen Toussaint with Moonchild, Willie Dixon with Leonard Bernstein, Charles Mingus with Brian Wilson, and Harry Nilsson with Harry Parth. Other candidates were Captain Beefheart, Smokey Robinson, Bob Dylan, Barry White, Scott Joplin, Steve Wonder, Charles Ives and Sun Ra. The first paired George Gershwin with James Brown, an unlikely musical partnership that was only partly successful. The Residents' futile attempts to recreate the lush big band jazz numbers of Gershwin sound weak and miscalculated, as does the frankly gutless version of James Brown's *Love At The Apollo* album, which totally fails to capture the Godfather of Soul's spirit, energy and passion. Their non-album single version of Brown's "It's A Man's Man's World" finally got the balance right with a crawling synth beat over which a raw-throated Resident caws out JB's macho testimony.

The second LP in the series, *Stars & Hank Together*, slammed Country legend Hank Williams up against marching band composer John Philip Sousa, another







Elaborate and money draining: *The Hole Show*

guitarist/vocalist/keyboard player Snakefinger (aka Philip Lithman) whose unique style played an important role in the group's pre-sampling days. A veteran of the 60s London blues rock boom, Lithman came into contact with The Residents through the aforementioned N Senada, who arranged a meeting. According to Cryptic folklore, Lithman became Snakefinger after playing an early 'audition night' gig with the group in October 1971 at the Boarding House in San Francisco. During a mesmerising, hallucinogenic violin solo, one of his fingers appeared to become boneless and began scurrying in the air like a charmed snake. A Resident captured this phenomenon on camera and the resulting photograph earned Lithman his nom de guerre. Snakefinger soon became an integral part of The Residents' sound, making valuable contributions to *Fingerprince*, *Duck Stab* and the groundbreaking "Satisfaction" single, where his acid

nose guitar took centre stage. In the late 70s Snakefinger signed with Ralph Records to issue a series of solo albums (some with contributions from The Residents themselves). *Chewing Hides The Sound* and *Greener Pastures* are his first two, containing such greatest hit cult singles as "The Spot", "What Wilbur!" and "Kill The Great Raven", together with his mutated and mutilated version of Kraftwerk's "The Model", which predates the Krautrock revival by over a decade.

On later albums, the guitarist formed Snakefinger's Vestal Virgins, a full-blown avant boogie outfit which included the synthesizer attack of former Captain Beefheart protégé Eric Drew Feldman. Although less manic in their approach, The Vestal Virgins provided the perfect backbeat around which Snakefinger coiled his unique songwriting, guitar playing and arranging skills. Here he sounds happy, loose and free, incorporating a variety of musical styles into a wide ranging repertoire

that today still sounds surprisingly fresh. Although out of print, the *Night Of Desirable Objects* album is well worth tracking down, as is the Snakeywork CD (UWEB 002 deleted). The Residents' personal musical tribute to their friend and comrade who died of a heart attack in July 1987 at the age of 38. Unable to attend his funeral in London, The Residents held their own wake in San Francisco, where they played a series of English laments and a stringently beautiful version of Hank Williams' "Six More Miles (To The Graveyard)". Snakeywork perfectly captures the strangeness and solemnity of the occasion, a fitting tribute to a great lost talent whose passing wounded The Residents deeply. As the group released the black veiled helium balloons heavenwards in his memory at the end of the service, they knew that a major part of themselves had also vanished into thin air.

Thanks to Ian Shirley for loan of the images used in this article.

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**Smelly Tongues** Unofficial Residents Fan Club with fan contributions, rumour mill, plenty of pictures: www.smelly-tongues.com/  
**Atreacordings** Mail order site with dedicated Residents zone including Real Audio files from much of the group's available back catalogue: www.atreacordings.com

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# ***invisible jukebox***

Every month we play a musician a series of records which they're asked to identify and comment on — with no prior knowledge of what they're about to hear. This month it's the turn of . . .



**Gary Lucas**

Tested by Mike Barnes. Photo: Mattias Ek

Gary Lucas publicly debuted as a guitarist with a teenage garage group, but he made his first significant impact in the marginally more formal setting of the European premiere of Leonard Bernstein's *Moss* in Venice in 1973. After seeing Captain Beelhearts & The Magic Band in the 1970s, he vowed that if he ever played in a group it would be with Van Vliet. Lucas's wish came true when he joined The Magic Band for their last two albums, *Cox* and *The Resistor Station* (1980) and *Ice Cream For Crow* (1982).

Following a post-Beelhearts hiatus, his solo career commenced in earnest in 1988. In the 90s he went on to release five solo albums and an EP, two of them with his on/off group Gods And Monsters, whose ranks briefly included Jeff Buckley.

A generous and enthusiastic collaborator, elsewhere Lucas has worked — in concert or on recording sessions — with Eric Mingus, Nick Cave, Mary Margaret O'Hara, John Langford, Piasa, People Of The Universe, Future Sound Of London, Ol' Spooky, Van Dyke Parks, Domo Suzuki and William Hooker. In performance, he draws upon a repertoire of more than 300 pieces at the last count. Lucas is also a soundtrack composer for TV and film, as well as providing live accompaniment to a number of silent movies, most notably the 1920 German expressionist film *The Golem*. But perhaps his most adventurous work emerges from his solo performances, which often as not take in blues, folk, rock and avant explorations of guitar and electronics, applied to a mixture of original compositions and idiosyncratic cover versions of Sun Ra, Wagner, Bernard Herrmann and a myriad more. The year 2000 was especially fertile for Lucas, yielding a Jewish-themed album, *Secret Of Lost Brothers* (on John Zorn's Tzadik label), *Level The Playing Field* (a compilation of early Gods And Monsters tracks, on Last Call), and a 20-year retrospective of hitherto unreleased material, *Improve The Shinning Hour* (Knitting Factory Works). The Jukebox took place in London.



**CHARLES MINGUS**  
"How Calling Blues" from *Oh Yeah* (Atlantic Jazz) 1961

Sounds like Mingus. I've got to identify the cut?

Not necessarily, but do you

know who's playing on it?

Jimmy Knepper on trombone, I would say. Booker Ervin, is he on that? Shih Hadad, maybe? Roland Kirk?

All correct, except Hadad.

Mingus is a tremendous hero of mine. I thought that his basically Duke Ellington-derived writing for ensembles, mixed with his modernist tendencies, combined to make some of the most pleasurable, soul-satisfying music I've ever heard. It satisfied me on the really gutbucket, earthy blues level, which is an element I seek out. Any music I enjoy listening to more or less has to have some element of blues or a

spiritual, spooky, otherworldly quality. And then it's got these great intellectual constructs on top of the writing, so it goes beyond hard bop clichés into beautiful experiments, with the time signature changing. I also love the fact that he didn't chart out a lot of the music. I'm told that, very much like Beelhearts, he would scattering parts to a lot of the players. So when you hear them jamming it's very conversational. It's like checking out each other and the landscape and the chicks walking by. Wow, man, this is the hippest fucking shit. It's very rigorous, it's down. I love Mingus. I'd elevate him to the pantheon, definitely.

**This is from Oh Yeah.**

Ah, well, this could be the best Mingus record, actually. This is his rock 'n' roll record. This is as rock as The Rolling Stones in a way. They're preaching, testifying. It's why I like Albert Ayler, all these sanctified sax players. It's like straight out of the church and a left turn into the brothel.



**DAVY GRAHAM**  
"Hajun" from *Folk, Blues And Beyond...* (Topic) 1964

Davy Graham. I know it from the tone of his guitar and the Indian scales. Cool. I have this record. I got it in

1969. "Tritana" is the cut that I was really taken with. He was, is, a fantastic player, and certainly an influence on my playing.

**Were you into the 60s English folk scene?**

Totally. There's something about the acoustic playing, where Indian scales were woven into the mix coupled with the Celtic feel that sends me even to this day. I find it strikes a chord in my soul, a really deep resonance. There's a brooding, dark quality to this kind of playing. Also with Davy Graham, there's a certain tonality that reminds me of my acoustic guitar. I use electric guitar strings on my acoustic guitar — this is the secret of my success, such as it is [laughs]. But this is a very unorthodox way, they're very light gauge strings. I also use the flesh of my fingertips rather than hard shell picks, and I think this is what he's doing here. I prefer his instrumental music to his vocalising, obviously, but a lot of people say that about me as well. He's a superb player. I got into him first through playing Bert Jansch and then reading about Davy Graham.

**Your National Steel Duolian guitar dates back to the 20s. Do you ever wonder who played it before you?**

Sure. Whoever had it, they beat it to shit. The previous owners have affected my music in a way. Somebody's old spirit could have rubbed off on this thing — I like that. I would much rather play an antique instrument, not that it embodies my playing particularly, but someone broke the thing in and tossed the shit around a little bit.

But I prefer old to new, that's my aesthetic. When I was 22 I went out with a 56-year-old woman. I lived with her — it was my first real love affair.

## DOCTOR NERVE

**"When It Blows Its Stacks" from *Every Screaming Ear* (Cuneiform) 1997**

[At start of bassline] Oh no! This is [Captain Beelhearts] "When It Blows Its Stacks", but it's not Beelhearts. Oh, it's painful to hear the guy shredding his vocal chords. I like the horn arrangement, though. Is this something with Bruce Fowler?

No.

It's a very faithful recreation of this tune, with the marmite and everything. And little Zappa! — sirs, creeping in. I'd say this is a decent attempt, but I find the vocal quality very strange.

**Beelhearts originals are so idiosyncratic that versions are difficult to pull off. And anyone trying to sing like him is onto a loser.**

You can't do it. That's why I've avoided it for the time being. If this singer had done it in a whisper, or at right angles away from the original vocal, it would be more successful. But I love the tune, it's one of the best Beelhearts rock tunes. I don't know, you've got to tell me.

**It's US avant rock big band Doctor Nerve.**

OK, [guitarist] Nick Dodziowski. Yeah, well, I'm aware of them, and I've heard bits and pieces over the years. I think they're OK. It's one of the better Beelhearts covers.

**Did you hear the Fast And Bulbous Beelhearts tribute album?**

I heard The Membranes' version of the track I played on, "Ice Cream For Crow". It was rocked up fast, it was pretty bad. It's a daunting task. You're always going to get the accusations, I guess, from the partisan Beelhearts fans of not capturing the spirit of the original, or sticking religiously to the arrangements, and because the arrangements were so rigorously worked out, it's a difficulty to surmount. The best approach would be to do fantasias on the pieces, without adhering too rigorously to the original.

## POPOL VUH

**"Morgengruß III" from *Music From The Film Aguirre, Wrath Of God* (Ohr) 1975**

This is Aguirre. This is the beautiful music of the primitives in the held where they're going to decimate Aguirre and his crew [in Werner Herzog's 1972 movie]. It's on the soundtrack that's ascribed to Popol Vuh, but I guess it's not them playing this. It could be a field recording.

**My fault. It's actually a short link to the track I wanted to play.**

I love this, this is in my top ten. Big influence on me [it links [Popol Vuh's] Florian Frickie is a genius and Herzog was a genius to realise how expansive and how well-served this music was to his films. This is one group where I was hooked on their sound and got their collected works. But outside of their soundtrack music for Herzog, I think their [later] stuff is in a sad New Agey category. But the soundtracks to *Nosferatu*, *Aguirre* and *Fitzcarraldo* are gorgeous, evocative, have every ingredient needed to transport you into the film. It's

## invisible jukebox

really hallucinatory. It's almost medieval, very regal and heratic, describing a universe that's parallel to this reality. And it just sounds right.

**You've covered a fair amount of film music, including *Fricke's*.**

My parents used to play a lot of Broadway musicals, and I loved things like Francis Lai's soundtrack to [Claude Lelouch's] *A Man And A Woman*. I love Nino Rota's music. Michel Legrand's music from [Jacques Demy's] *The Umbrellas Of Cherbourg*. It's superb. And I love 60s British film music by John Dankworth, for instance. Recently, I was commissioned to score a documentary [Maya's *Love's Kin* — *The Legacy Of Cotton*]. What a dream gig. It's about poverty in Mississippi and the depredations that the cotton industry has made among the people living and working among the fields to this day. It was able to pour my heart and soul into the very blues based score — fundamentally solo guitar.



**JEFF BUCKLEY**  
"Tongue" from *Grace* EP  
(Columbia) 1995

This does sound familiar. It's a German band? Pink Floyd? This is tantalizing. Man? No? Shit!

**If we had played anything**

**other than this 14 minute space drone instrumental, it would have been too obvious.**

[After ten minutes] Jeff Buckley. I know what this is, the repeat on the guitar, I've heard this. This is "Tongue" [laughs]. What can I tell you, man? It's like when I heard "Dream Brother." Jeff definitely loved The Doors' "The End", which was an antecedent for this track. This sounds like space rock of the Pink Floyd/German/Can variety. It's good, but this repeat, where it becomes very obvious that he has sampled his guitar with the sample cutting off, just disturbs me. I don't want to be so aware of the process of how it was made. The playing is great, Jeff was an excellent guitarist. This is Jeff with the Telecaster and the echoplex, which was the Syd Barrett formula.

**"Grace", which you co-composed with Buckley, is extraordinary. How did it take shape?**

We rehearsed it in the studio with my band [Gods And Monsters], but he had his back to us, and just kind of mumbled the lyrics, so I didn't even know what he was actually going to sing, and didn't pay that much attention. But I took the leap of faith with him. I had the feeling he was going to do something great. Then we recorded the band track and he came round at about six or seven o'clock and just laid it down. That was the first time I was hearing what he was doing. There was a bit more Indian influence in the vocal than his final version, as he was really heavily into Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan. He came out and said, "Was that good?" And I said, "That was fucking brilliant, this is going to shake the world!" It didn't really sound like rock, it was beyond it.

**How do you rate him as a singer?**

Technically he was head and shoulders beyond most singers. Beefheart used to say, "I turn myself inside out when I sing." And Jeff too. Of course he was totally different, but he had that intensity.

**What was it like for a Tim Buckley fan working with his son?**

Well, it was unusual, except that night away. Jeff made it clear that he was his own guy, even though he was an uncanny ability to mimic his father, and he knew the repertoire backwards and forwards. I just thought, here's a bright young kid with bags of charisma and fantastic vocal abilities. It's like with Eric [Mingus, with whom Lucas has also performed], I don't look at them both and see their dad's faces superimposed. Genetic history is not a turn on for me.

### MUSZIKÁS

**"The Booster Is Crowing" from *Flammaras* — *The Last Jewish Music Of Transylvania* (Hannibal) 1993**  
by Britta?

**No, it's Maria Sebestyén.**  
She's Czech? Hungarian?

**She and the group are Hungarian.**

I love this kind of music. My roots are Czech, Hungarian, German, Jewish, Bohemian.

**Some of this group had played in pre-War Jewish ensembles and could remember the times, but the musicians themselves were murdered in the Holocaust.**  
I've never heard this, it's beautiful. I didn't really get



any specific Jewish feelings [from it]. It's so sad, it's really heartbreaking. My relatives in Eastern Europe came mainly from the area of Białystok, Poland, a little town called Jedwabne. In 1941 all the Jews in the community had been rounded up into a barn that was then set on fire. A few years ago I came across a letter in *The New York Times* from a fellow discussing this incident authoritatively. I looked him up in the phone directory and found him living in Brooklyn. He showed me a book produced by a rabbi who had been connected to a survivor of the community. It had a list of all the Jewish families that had died in the barn, and I found my family name in there. This was like lightning striking. It's pretty ghastly. I never played in Poland, but in Hungary and particularly in the Czech Republic I always got the feeling like I was coming home.

I like to hear ethnic sounding Jewish music, but to play it is another thing. I've never really attempted to play klezmer music. As close as I ever got to klez was a piece on my new record on Tzadik, *Street Of Lost Brothers*, called "Tel Aviv Ghetto Fighters Song," which is me with a bunch of Chinese musicians in Taiwan doing Jewish sounding music, and I'm doing like Heavy Metal Jewish guitar.

I always felt secure enough in my identity as a musician, particularly the way I pursued music. I like that when I came to record these records for Zorn, I never did any overtly klezmer sounding music — unlike a lot of musicians who have gotten deep into that mode of music making and those scales. [In my music] it's more cultural references than anything. I figured that if it was filtered through my warped sensibility, such as it is, it would come out with a kind of Jewish vibe. That's what I wanted to get across, because there is no really specific test for Jewish music. If you were going to subject it to that kind of scrutiny, it would be like the Nazis looking for decadent art.



## FUTURE SOUND OF LONDON

**"You're Creeping Me Out" from *FSOL* (Virgin) 1994**

I love the organ sounds. It's got a Terry Riley feeling to the organ. It's got a

Tangerine Dream thing to it. Could it be Future Sound? Yes, from *FSOL*.

This is the notorious concert where they didn't appear, right? I've seen a clip of it. It is very good, very evocative, kind of like an update of the kraut space rock of the mid-70s that I liked to listen to. Tangerine Dream, Peter Baumann, Klaus Schulze. As Ambient tracks go, this is definitely a good one. A great record to make love to.

## Is it more sexual than Pingu?

A different head altogether. If you were more into contemplative, Tancin, sustained orgasm techniques, you'd want to have this accompany you. If you were into

more frenetic, sweaty fucking, then you'd go for Mingus, definitely.

**You were put in touch with FSOL by Rik Mosken [aka Neotropic] following your still unreleased collaboration with her. What happened?**

In '98 I was brought to their studio and hit it off. They had all these tracks prepared and said, "OK, let's see what you do." So I gave them two or three days of ideas of music to sort through. I've heard a lot of mixed tracks that sound great, but I'm not sure where the project stands.

## What inspired your Ambient, space guitar style?

After leaving Beefheart I was floundering for some years trying to find a direction. I had played with the best, the number one avant-garde rock band. The influences that showed me that path were Syd Barrett, David G. Lutz, late 60s psychedelic guitar stylings and the English variety. What Syd Barrett did with the Binson Echorec. I was going for that.

I also worked with [guitarist] Bill Friesel, producing a Tim Berne record for Columbia Records called *Futon Street Motel*. I knew a bit about Bill and I'd heard some of the records, but it didn't really make sense until I got in there and heard him play. It wasn't so much what he was doing, but the idea of using digital delays for extended technique of guitar vocabulary. There's something with these falling pitches you can get with delays and slide guitar [that] gives a human quality to the playing, and that's what I want to get across more than anything: human emotions that run the gamut from ecstatic to psychotic to really melancholic states. It was an attempt to transmit my feelings for ethereality, because I often feel haunted — by memories, inner dreams, by people I know who are no longer here. And music is the ideal medium to express these states of mind.

## TISZJÍ MUÑOZ

**"Confrontation" from *Present Without A Trace* (Anami) 1997**

Shit, this isn't this unknown New Yorker? I think I have heard this. This guy has been around since the 60s. A guy played this to me in the Downtown Music Gallery, which is a very good store in New York. It was like 'This is this unsung genius.' And I liked it. It's very much out of [John] McLaughlin, if you ask me. This reminds me a lot of the Mahavishnu style, early McLaughlin, maybe a little more abstruse. What's his name?

**Tiszji Muñoz. He's played with Pharoah Sanders on and off for 25 years. *Rashed All* is on drums here.**

It's really good. I wouldn't categorize it as jazz or rock. Do you know who I think is the best exponent of this style of guitar? Ollie Halsall. He could play the shit out of this frenetic jazz rock stuff. This kind of really athletic free jazz style on guitar, he was my favourite. It's good. I occasionally do into this bag. The trick with this kind of music is to vary dynamics and textures, because if you do too much of it, it's like too much of anything. After a while it just congeals as the wall of sound and it can be something people don't want to

scale, do you know what I'm saying? It's daunting and I want to draw people in. But a little of it is great, it's bracing.

## LEONARD BERNSTEIN

***Prelude, Fugue And Riffs from The Jazz Album (EMI Classics) 1949, recorded 1987***

Kurt Weil? Is this Darius Milhaud? It isn't The Mike Westbrook Big Band?

It was written in 1949.

Really? Wait a second. This isn't Stan Kenton's big band, *City Of Glass*, by Robert Graettinger? You know, Leonard Bernstein did music like this.

It is Bernstein. It reminds me of Stravinsky's *Ebony*.

**Concerts, written a few years earlier for Woody Herman.** Well, see, it takes a lot of the nervous energy of people like Stravinsky, and there's a big Kurt Weil influence in there. And it's got a lot of the monodic drive of what he developed later as *West Side Story*, but it's more angular and dissonant, very jazzy.

**Like these scored attempts at jazz that end up as something quite different.**

Gershwin was probably the best popular exemplar of someone doing that. *Aphrodite in Blue* was the big breakthrough, but that was very sedate compared to this. It's funny because Bernstein later in his life scorned atonal and 12-tone music. He gave lectures at Harvard saying, 'You look at music like the syntax of writing, atonal music or 12-tone music is like scrambled information that doesn't make any sense. But here he is flirting with dissonances. It's nice.

**Now did you get to play at the European premiere of Bernstein's *Moss*?**

I was a terrific fan of Bernstein as an educator and a populist of modern music. There was a [TV] series on CBS, *Young People's Concerts*, which was where I first got exposed to Stravinsky. He did a show on Mahler, it was great stuff. When I got to Yale, I happened to see a notice that The Yale Symphony Orchestra was looking for... And they listed various requirements for Bernstein's *Moss*, one of them being electric guitar. I said I'd like to audition for this piece and although I'm not a great sight-reader, for guitar anyway, I could do it. I studied the score and got the gig. Then Bernstein came to supervise the production in Vienna and gave me specific instructions. I met with him and we hit it off. I'd quit him and he'd give me his opinions — and he was incredibly opinionated. I said, what do you think about Pierre Boulez? And he just made a face like he'd bitten into a rotten tomato saying, 'To tell you the truth, everyone is giving Boulez credit for these "rag concerts" [informal events for young people to listen and talk about modern music], and I pioneered that with The Philharmonic years before he did.' A little bit of professional envy there. I'd say, 'What do you think of The Naxos version of "America"?' And he was like, 'Well, I thought it was pretty puerile. They could have done something more adventurous than they actually did.' He was very acerbic and witty, taking the piss out of everybody, and I thought, 'What a cool guy.'

# sound check

Independence day: February's selected CDs, albums and singles

- Azapa
- Thomas Brinkmann
- Brokeback
- Michael Byron
- Chris Carter
- Cathedral
- Casey Fanni Tutti
- Loren Mazzacane Connors
- Vladislav Delay
- James Fei
- Barnt Friedman
- Daniel Givens
- Brian Glick
- Keiji Haino & Derek Bailey
- Franz Hautzinger
- Hugh Hopper
- Hopper S. Klossner
- Juh Wobble & Evan Parker
- Phil James
- Jan Jelinek
- Elvin Jones
- Kiedaich/Svoboda/Hahn
- Lee Konitz
- Suzanne Langille & Loren Mazzacane Connors
- Thomas Lehr
- Marley Moore/Rinaldo
- Mokira
- Ennio Morricone & Gruppo DI Improvisazione Nuova Consonanza
- Motorbowl T & #2
- Tiziji Puzos
- Toshimaru Nakamura
- Neco
- Pascals
- Annette Peacock
- Repeat
- Reynolds
- Rains
- 2nd Gen
- Seeking
- Chas Smith
- Wadada Leo Smith
- Soomen
- David Thomas & Two Pale Boys
- Keith Tippett
- Tortoise
- Warhorse

*Plus new compilations, reissues, misshapen, avant rock, dub, electronica, global, hip-hop, jazz and other limits releases in brief*

## Azapa

Makulu

NOVEMBER 10/11, 1

## Kiedaich/Svoboda/Hahn

Wahne

NOVEMBER 10/11, 1

Azapa derived from the names of *Wahne*. Arjen Tang, violinist Zoltan Lantos, and percussionist Pálfi Hani. *Makulu* is a *Wahne* Philippine plant. The trio can produce *Makulu* textures, but their melodic lines are vigorous and strongly delineated. From Hungary, Lantos employs elements of Eastern European folk and Indian modes to which his fluent, linear improvising. Vanna based Tang extends to depth, tang a harmonic core or adding bowed layers. Hani plays with agility between the strings, adding enigmatic vocings and enhancing the collective sound by means of live electronics.

Michael Kiedaich, based in Stuttgart, plays *Makulu* telephone and other percussion. His compositions on *Wahne* stem from a collaborative project with scientist Alexander Lutzenwieser, who uses water to make visible the forces generated by sonic vibration. In performance, those kaleidoscopic patterns are projected by means of a video camera onto a screen as a visualization of the music. The trio also features Bernhard Hahn on saxophones, flutes, bass clarinet and percussion, and Mike Svoboda who plays trombone, tuba, didgeridoo, Alphorn and conch. Svoboda can be heard on Ensemble Modus's recording of *Zapata: The Yellow Shores* and on the new Stockhausen edition release *Puls 3rd*. Svoboda's *Kiedaich* works attractive, mostly gentle, yet-fingered music that encompasses a broad range of pitch and tonal colour within its modest and intimate.

JULIAN COWLEY

## Thomas Brinkmann

Kirk

NOVEMBER 10/11, 1

This latest release from the prof. Brinkmann finds the *Collegium* reaffirming its, and *Collegium* and commitment to the creative possibilities of needle and groove. Nowwithstanding the digital label "0001" (0010) etc) and CD format, these ten tracks are built entirely from clicks and gurgles out into the virtual grooves of old records. Via two discs, a mixer and some basic effects, Brinkmann orchestrates a modest collection of fractured loops, slowly adding subtracting

and bouncing them around to create intricate patterns of thrusts and ripples, hisses and pops. This is turntable degree zero, why violence without any underlying source material, and more a tribute to the machine and the medium than to the manual pyrotechnics of the DJ.

By his own account, Brinkmann has been performing experiments with mutated vinyl since the late '70s. But at this late date, lock-groove workouts are nothing new. The proof there is in the pudding and, for the most part, this pudding is rich and delicious. If such language is appropriate to an austere collection of mechanically generated percussion.

Kick plays from Techno (Brinkmann's home territory). Rather than harnessing the beats and grooves to any particular program, he seems happy to follow them wherever they may go. Even where the 4/4 drop is explicit, the emphasis is more on the extraordinary sonic evocations these vinyl incursions suggest: helicopter flutters and tipped plastic zipper swells and crumpling leaves. "0001" delivers rapidfire piles of chattering ticks and punctuating booms that simultaneously call to mind the burning embers sampled by Xenakis on *Concert Ph* and a derelict tapdance routine. On "0100" Brinkmann's beats approximate a jittery Latin groove. "1001" hints at a Techno pulse, but as it picks up the rapid breakbeats and deep thunders clips sound more like the Buand drummers on overdrive.

Of course all of this takes place within a fairly narrow sonic range, and after an hour any sonic discrimination begins to falter. Nonetheless, as both a warg and demonstration and an excavation into minimalist funk, *Kick* is a fine fare.

CHRISTOPH COX

## Brokeback

Morse Code In The Modern Age Across The Americas

WALL, KODEN (HALL) CD

Doug McCombs began *Brokeback* as a side project to Tortoise, Eleven's Dream Day and Pulmon. For its second release he's added Noel Kuperstein to the line-up and recruited James McNew (Yo La Tengo) and Mary Hansen (Smearhead) to the studio sessions in NYC, which were later mixed in Chicago by Tortoise colleague John McEntire, resulting in a short but intense disc of environmental bits. Of its three cuts, *Living Of The Rhythm* Experts is the most lively, a long shifting dream-encounter that is worthy for one of

Krautrock companions. *Hermosa* and early Kitchener's song to mind. It opens in a pastoral mood with a melody that's suggested by space and restrained lead guitars. Alan Licht and Theo Doska. Guitars Tim Fogarty against a heavily muted, muted percussion track. *Kurly* is the exuberant of walking on dried music. Then Noel Kuperstein's up for sweeps into the mix as gracefully as a giant lion landing on Lake Erie, closing the listener to catch breath. The closing minutes take on a more uncertain tone, like entering an unlikely city by night.

McEntire and McCombs deserve a Ted Mazer award for their bright production sound — the space of the stereo image and clarity of recording are stunning. Esquivel would turn green, if he hadn't already through eating moon cheese. The second track, showcases Kuperstein's acoustic bass — this is music from the sacred ranch where Charles Mingus made a secret record with guitarists Larry Coryell and Philo Catherine, after they'd wrapped up "Geordie Pink Pie Hat".

"Burning Score" is one example of why some compare this music to *Phonology*. With its featured strings, lush choir and slow John Barry guitar, it's a tad corny, threatening to become "What Now Mr. Love" at any turn. But the ambitions are laudable — the track has a flawed grandeur. Are you starting to see moving images in your head? Good, because that's the idea. Brink King (who adds his projections to *Brokeback*) performances contributes more footage to the CD-ROM portion of this release. My machine wouldn't let me use the time, but maybe we should let mind movies, prevail, close your eyes to enjoy a vision of driving across America in 1972.

JOE PINSANT

## Michael Byron

Mono CD Nights Without Moon Or Pearl

GOLD BLUE GROUND, CD

Michael Byron's present *New Jersey* home may conflict with the West Coast orientation of the resuscitated Cold Blue label, but the music here certainly fits with its West Coast, post-minimalist ethos. As a performer, Byron has worked with William Winant and the American garden ensemble Son Of Lion, but this line CD features him exclusively as composer.

The title track is the most entrancing piece — although despite its roots in minimalism, it's certainly not trance music. But it's an arch form in that a rise in intensity and activity precedes a decline. Rapidly shaken eppages

on two pairs are set against a string quartet and bass, with a synthesizer drifting in the background. The music is harmonically static but rhythmically unpredictable, with string accents falling like rain — a totally refreshing effect. The similarly shaped *Inside Seeds*: For James Tenney is scored for the same forces though here the strings are always aco.

These pieces, both performed by Calarts New Century Players, are from 1998 and mark a change of direction from his dense, relentless mid-70s work *Environics*. For four piano, performed and released by David Rosenboom, it is minimalist rather than mimetic. Richard Feibelbaum's *seventies* are Callahan in more than one sense: in their eulogy to the music of an old friend, but the sentiment is forgivable when the results are this beautiful.

ANDY HAMILTON

### Chris Carter

**Electronic Ambient Remixes One**  
(JENNIFER INTERNATIONAL, CT) \$12.95 CD

### Cosey Fanni Tutti

**Time To Tell**  
(JENNIFER INTERNATIONAL, CT) \$12.95 CD

### Cosey Fanni Tutti

**Electronic Ambient Remixes Two**  
(JENNIFER INTERNATIONAL, CT) \$12.95 CD

If Chris Carter and Cosey Fanni Tutti use of *Throbbing Gristle* and the Creative Technology Institute, will need any introduction or reappraisal, then these two remix albums coupled with the release of Cosey's *Time To Tell* (originally a 1982 limited cassette release) are an alluring place to start.

As *Time To Tell*'s booklet asserts, TG were a "disturbing force within the music scene. Their practice, often indistinguishable from live art rhetoric, also provided a space for the liminal to bleed into the larger arena that the outer limits of music allowed. So too with Carter and Cosey's work. Tracking between Carter's *Aloneness Two* and its template, 1980's *The Space Between*, there's an immediate paradox: a lack of both remembrance and reinvention. Whatever the remix strategy employed by Carter, the two records are at once so similar and yet widely dissimilar as to produce an aural sense of déjà vu, of an uncanny hand at work. Certainly the *Throbbing Gristle* electronics of the earlier record are removed. The remixes startle the residual sense of yearning that they share with Krautrock's *Trans-Europe Express* period into a series of delicate flanges and oscillators that venture off into the ether. Unlike earlier CTI remixes by Carl Craig or Mike Portnoy, the temptation to anchor the soundscapes with beats has been ignored. *Aloneness One's* distracted sense of distance is the point, where the technological process sets off its own trajectories in the mind of the listener.

The companion pieces to Carter's remission are, of course, Cosey's releases. *Remixes Two* consists of reinterpretations and

updates of *Time To Tell*'s four tracks, and its soundworld — a topology of meandering features, half-glimpsed constructions — sits well with Carter's own remixes. And yet the original recordings remain the most persuasive ones. They occupy a direct relation to Cosey's larger body of work — this release comes with a 40-page booklet in which she discusses the integration between performance and her work in the sex industry (as model, stripper, actress). The overarching synths and naturalistic timbres of *Time To Tell*'s 23-minute title track create a sensual nocturnal darkness that wouldn't be out of place on a John Carpenter soundtrack. But the sense here is of revelation: "Enochian presented live and spontaneously... there is communication." Cosey speaks softly, in a tone that mixes intimacy and danger. The slow, juddering, imitative rhythm reinforces the tone before "Such Is Life" reaches a resolution in its dilution of sound.

These glacial tempi are reimagined on *Aloneness Two*, but with markedly different results. Using sound sources from "significant events" from [her] personal life, an accretion of musical compositions and personal statements, the album's core is one of sonic and individual change. If the distant, barely audible voice that inhabits sections of both Cosey albums frustrates in its unwillingness to reveal itself, it is ultimately of more interest in its associations. Could a link be made between this secrecy and women's position in the sex industry? Whatever the most striking aspect of all three albums is their contemporaneity. Not only do they demonstrate the duo's presence; they also show how everything is at heart a work in progress.

LOUISE GRAY

### Loren MazzaCane Connors

**Portrait Of A Soul**  
(BLOOM, IL) CD

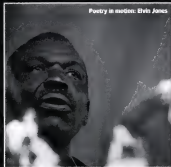
### Suzanne Langille & Loren MazzaCane Connors

**1982-1988**  
(BLOOM, IL) CD

Blooms' proclaims an unnamed young singer in Peter Guadri's melancholy American folk history *Lost Highway* "is the foundation of it all. More than a foundation. Because you can come and tear the building down, but you can't destroy the ground it's built on." Since 1988 when Loren MazzaCane Connors first returned to making music, after a four-year hiatus, forsaking the acoustic guitar for the purity of the electric sound, he's raised many a haunted house on its scorched ruins. These two CDs — one a compilation of electric recordings with his wife Suzanne Langille, the other a solo electric set from last year, perfectly bookend a career that has seen him pulverize the blues into idiosyncratic shape. *Portrait Of A Soul* started life as a series of sketches of an unnamed, perhaps national



Langille and Connors: *Portrait Of A Soul*



**Elvin Jones**  
The Complete Blue Note Elvin Jones Sessions  
MOBAC 1983-195 BXCD

Elvin Jones left John Coltrane's group in January 1966. It was a turning point in the evolution of Coltrane's music — Jones had been an axis of the great Quartet, the first fully collaborative improviser among jazz drummers. But upset by the introduction of second drummer Rashied Ali, he commented shortly after leaving that "at times I couldn't hear what I was doing — matter of fact, I couldn't hear what anybody was doing. All I could hear was a lot of noise." This was a personality clash with Ali rather than a rejection of Coltrane's late music, which he went on to defend eloquently.

Even so, the drummer's musical response was never so free as Coltrane's in his last, brief period. It's charted in this wonderful eight CD set from the peerless Mosaic reissue series, which presents the complete Blue Note recordings from 1967-73. These albums have mostly long been out of print; many have not been previously released on CD. But there's at least four CDs worth of absolutely classic material here, and the rest is very fine.

It's been suggested that Elvin Jones was not the most innovative of leaders, and that albums under his own name lacked a strong concept. Hearing the set of Blue Note albums complete shows how wrong that view is. 1973's jazz-rock-influenced *The Prime Element* compares with Herbie Hancock's *Sextant* as a neglected recording of that era — this is Elvin Jones at his most experimental, and gives the lie to the criticism that after his work with Coltrane, the drummer was content to revisit familiar stylistic territory.

Part of the strength comes from the high standard of original compositions, most by group members. There's always been a significant Japanese input to Jones's music, coming from his wife Kiko, and she has an important role as composer here contributing among other numbers the delightful and too brief "The Children's Merry-Go-Round March" and "Mr. Jones".

Many players could be surprised at the subtlety of Jones's drumming. Lee Konitz had thought of him as a "wild man"

until he supported the saxophonist beautifully on the classic *Motion*. Dave Liebman's essay in the accompanying booklet is an eloquent and essential commentary on the style of Elvin Jones, and it's hard to see how it could be superseded. Liebman writes that "Nothing is rigid, everything is in motion, producing a flowing, legato style." The comments on Jones's dynamic mastery — "one of the greatest of all time in jazz" — remind me of the first time I heard *A Love Supreme*, with a transitional passage for drums that was thrilling simply because of this dynamic control.

Liebman's analysis is informed by his long experience as soprano and tenor saxophonist in Elvin Jones's group. Talking about how the drummer's beat appears stretched and laid back, he says that on "a slow blues with such a wide beat and big sound... it feels like the entire ocean is beneath you." Irregularly shifting accents set up a polyrhythmic feel and composite textures which disguised the basic pulse. Though Jones wasn't personally identified with either free jazz or jazz-rock, his revolution in jazz drumming was crucial to both.

The line-ups are mostly piano-less, and so the bass takes on a greater importance. The early groups have Jimmy Garrison from Coltrane's quartet, making for a trio with saxophonist Joe Farrell that produced minor classics such as "What Is This?", which features Garrison's trademark guitar-like strumming. "Gingerbread Boy", the off-center blues which Miles Davis had interpreted on *Miles Smiles*, is an unqualified classic with some very African-sounding drumming by the leader. Joe Farrell went on to join Chick Corea's *Return To Forever*, but remained underrated till his early death in 1986.

On *The Prime Element*, electric guitar, Jan Hammer's synthesizer and a battery of percussion, make for original results with dark, forbidding textures, sometimes too cluttered but always intriguing. "Whims Of Bal" ends with free, collective Improv unusual on this set of releases, the boiling percussion of "Paulie Tanzi" has ethereal comments from synthesizer, undergirded by impact. In fact all the sessions from 1971-73 which feature Jan Hammer on keyboards — piano, electric piano, glockenspiel and synthesizer to be precise — are revelatory. At this time he was also playing synthesizer in The Mahavishnu Orchestra, but became less prominent as an improviser after the success of his music for *Miami Vice*. "GG" and "Tergiversation" show what a fine keyboard player he was. The bluesy "GG" with the drummer's brother Thad on trumpet and Hammer on piano, creates something special out of a simple modal structure — surely one of the great jazz tracks of the 70s.

*Live At The Lighthouse* has always been highly regarded, and the complete recordings make up the final two CDs. There's a wonderfully tight quartet line-up with Dave Liebman and Steve Grossman on saxes — two of Coltrane's most thoughtful disciples — and Gene Perls on bass, and very inventive arrangements. Two ballads, Kurt Weill's "My Ship" and the torch song "I'm A Fool To Want You", inspire probably the finest interpretations. It's a magnificent close to a superb release.

ANDY HAMILTON

subject, but MazzaCore hit a wall as he gradually became convinced of the impossibility of ever really connecting with anyone else. So his focus turned inward and slowly transformed it into a self portrait. Without lapsing into self-pity or maudlin despair, he occasionally bleak blues paint a predominantly gentle and forgiving picture in crystal clear tones, as though he has negotiated a reconciliation of sorts with his past selves. The album ends with a prayer: "Not hopeful, or religious, but to myself that I must be satisfied".

On 1987-1989 however, Connors and Langille work their blues through other people's material, such as Lonnie Johnson's "Haunted House" (which they've revisited many times since), Chuck Berry's "Wee Wee Hours" and traditional songs like "Kumbaya" and "Motherless Child". Whether yearning with gnarly distortion or leaving them to flow free, MazzaCore has a way of holding notes until they sing, and here his playing is especially articulate. Indeed this disc holds some of the couple's bluest blues, with Langille sounding almost bewitched. "Amazing Grace", recast in Langille's bleating reading as a final redemptive plea swelling over MazzaCore's heartrending lead, caps the set.

DAVID KIRKMAN

## Vladislav Delay

Amma  
HILLS PLATINUM 1995 CD

After several albums treading the line between Ambient and dub-Techno and his superb multidimensional version of House as Luomo, Vladislav Delay returns with his most deconstructed spin on Techno yet. Take typical dub-Techno — all heading down, with the odd incursion into a second dimension and turn it 90 degrees, and you have Amma: a cross section of Techno, perhaps even a diagonal cut, caught cycling in place, supported, with any forward urge bounded from within, bent, being to sub-basement floor, caught again and returned inward. Like a video of Techno with the wind taken from its sails, left bobbing uncertainly in place, Delay captures every pitch and roll.

The culmination of many actual ideas Delay was exploring before he ventured into electronics, Amma shares Vagaro Mauer's live methodology with the improvisational aspect even more apparent. It follows the idea of a loop but warps it at every turn with ratty a receptive bent in sight. Constructed live by triggering various patches and samples with a MIDI percussion controller, Amma is the result of eight or nine successive, real-time recordings. Staccato slabs of monotone synthesizers in a range of textures, are layered and latched onto an unrelenting foundation of glitch-driven percussion. Offbeats emerge out of pockets of silence, echoes fall away to reveal residual voices. A four-to-the-floor rhythm underpins it all, but it's often apparent in suggestion alone, barely



sketched out by sidelong glances and highlights in the negative space, which reinforce the structure even as it's being evaded. Underneath it all is the ghost of a film soundtrack — "a nice anemic movie" as Delany puts it. Including only voices and no music. The bottom layer occasionally bleeds through the holes in Amara's structure, despoiling an almost subliminal sediment of a sentiment. The result is a swirling eddy of submerged objects and suspended motion: an hour of slow turbulence and upended resolution. The darkly uttered exclamation "I might stay alive forever" is the last sound on the record; and it's enough to jolt the listener back to the world with a start, leaving you to wonder and how long you've been gone.

**PHILIP SHEPHERD**

## Burnt Friedman

Plays Love Songs  
NONALUCE CD

Burnt Friedman's new album has been a long time coming. Begun in 1996, it was initially scheduled for release on Swedish Label Dot, then left SM for better eventually finding a home on his own Nonaluce label. On *Plays Love Songs* the album combines jazz and electronics with a flawless pop sensibility. Music is placed in relation to language in many different contexts that allow the two forms of communication to play with and against each other. This is most explicit in "Tongs Of Love" which pushes the conventions of the soundtrack to an imaginary move by contextualizing its ambiguous atmosphere with a disembodied voiceover. A Cherise-like gumshoe narrates a stereotypical Orientalist fantasy. It is a disquieting yarn about a nocturnal boat journey to an island, an exotic Asian temptress, and waking up on a beach having been burned on the head. The familiarity of such B-movie cliché means they require no additional image.

Other tracks display language to very different narrative effect. Most of "I Go With You" sounds like a quirky seaside mime routine with worded samples singing the title themes before it finishes, a beautiful jazz chorale plunges the track into a mournful nostalgia full of poignancy. "Where the sun shines bright/The waves are crashing/And the wind blows wild go with you." But the track stops after four lines, shattering the intimate dreamspace of a long deep lover's whispers and leaving nothing behind but the incomprehensible emptiness of waking.

Of the instrumental tracks, "Carpenter" features ECM jazzisms, brushed symbols, and clogs, and "Body Language" is a beautiful mix of acoustics and electronics. Here Friedman achieves a delicate balance between Pluram's spiritualized sound and Boards' D.C.'s indelible nostalgia. The results are quiet but more revealing, out of which a breathless firestorm to emerge but can't quite muster the energy to come to life. Friedman is fully aware of the music

industry's commodification of emotion. By covering the spectrum of desire from the awkwardness of adolescent virginity to a sex cult with fantasy theme rooms, it celebrates with Warholian irony the simultaneity of love as being equally playful, sensual, mundane and joyous. By refusing to prescribe a single ideal, it encourages you, in the words of its queer guide: to expand your horizons and "choose anything you want and just with yourselves."

**DER BORTHWICK**

## Daniel Givens

Age  
ARTISTWORKS CD/LP

This debut CD from Chicago based DJ Daniel Givens comes brimming with ahouse credentials. He's a writer/photographer/artist who's played with Ricky, Goldie and Tortoise jazz, spoken word, drum n' bass, Sun Ra and Augustus Pabst are numbered among his influences. In addition, he ropes in various post-angers and instrumentalists to his post-fusion and soul-jazz. It's too inundated with meeting points to inhibit any well-defined space, yet a definite style emerges.

First, there are Givens's offbeat drum patterns that describe rhythmic phrasing in such a way as to feel both wayward and assured. Half nodding to jazz tradition, half drawing on breezy post-rock deformations of linearity. Tracks roll persuasively and consistently along, often turning to the xylophone for fluidity, but they play on the edges of disorder. Likewise, there's a casual courting of dissonance and deconstruction that Givens manages to work economically into the album's warm, occasionally voluptuous ambience. "Vielstuck," for instance, sets high off-key whinnings which may be electronic or from a turner, against a soft rocking rhythm on the xylophone, while a synthetic bass note zooms unevenly around, floating down to a dull electric burr at the turn of a dial. "Retabular" has a toy organ noodling away limply out of key underneath the gangling vociferations of jazz-fusion snare, while "Eclipse" combines a sinuous melodic line on a cello with a faint rocket trail and casually swooping harmonies. In some places these weirdly aspects open out into a 70s spaciousness of shimmering fusion ensembles, rippled with ecstatic voices and electronic vibrations.

If a return to fusion's futuristic soul-fantasy is no longer the step into the unfamiliar it once was, the album's centerpiece — the three part 70s style concert track "Acknowledgement" — is intriguing for the way it flows towards post-rock ground in its latter half. Here the percussive xylophone rhythm and oblique nudges of organ, zooming aural chorus and winding flute give way to a restrained yet captivating three-legged instrumental line of xylophone, ghostly melodic and Jeff Parker's slowly locked guitar. In such moments, more than the occasional cosmic poem, the fusion feels persuasive and intriguing.

**PAIT PFFYKING**

## Brian Glick

Trophy  
NONSALCE CD

## James Fei

For aslophone for card reed and gated amplification  
ORGANISED SOUND RECORDINGS 1 PM CD/LP

*Trophy* is a 44-minute piece written for nonet and directed by the composer. As Brian Glick explains in his notes, he effectively assembled a Jazz Composers Orchestra his piece could not have been performed by a synthetic musicians. The listening tension recalls free improvisation, though there are none of the lapses into trad patchwork that can occur when improvisers arrange for large forces. The tone is sombre, eschewing the expressionism that usually stands for musical freedom and achieving instead a ponderous collectivity. Glick at distinct points, the horns (Glick's tenor sax Robert Cohen's alto James Fei's bass Daniel, Scott Peterson's baritone Chris Janak's tenor and Chris Mathews's trumpet) play extended notes that exert varying pressures on the listening body. Vibratophone Kevin Norton (himself responsible for a mighty piece of composed freedom. For Guy Debord) provides essential punctuation, his discursive phrases providing pivots between manic precision and harmonic efforescence. Sean Meaham's percussion provides loyally offworld scurries while Matthew Hayner, bassist in the volcanic free jazz quartet Teis, keeps things coherent with his magisterial aim. *Trophy* is the sound of thought about music: a respect to the facile clutter and glitter elsewhere. Glick longs for fireworks that aren't merely ornamental; he may not have brought them off yet, but he's swinging in the right direction.

James Fei's mini CD-R contains two short conceptual pieces. In the first, he explores the effect of contact making a signal with a paper card read and sending the signal to a gated fuzzbox and amplifier. His gradual increase of air pressure produces break ups and crunches not unlike those that first fans of extreme rock. In the second, he sings and plays "Campdown Races" into a bass sax, exploring the harmonic interference effects of the two sound sources. These exercises are rather dry, but do illustrate the earnestness and deliberation of the some around Glick and Norton in a world of cozy distractions, something clean and hard and necessary.

**DER WATSON**

## Keiji Haino & Derek Bailey

Songs  
NONSALCE CD

Songs? No chance. Instead two of the most sharply defined musical personas in the business go head to head. Haino vociferating and Bailey playing guitars. This session was recorded in late 1996 when the pair also



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Ain't going to Hades for no one:  
Evan Parker and Jah Wobble



## Jah Wobble & Evan Parker

Passage To Hades

30 HERZ H214 CD

Perhaps this is a disingenuous flesh of hindsight on my part, but I'm convinced that when I heard Public Image Limited's first album, back in 1978, I fantasised an addition to the group. That addition was Evan Parker, whose Saxophone Solos and Monocorns releases on Incus (1976 and 1978 respectively) had cut a new seam in the rockface of saxophony. The prospect was very enticing: Parker's unrelenting stream of reed shards cutting their own space alongside John Lydon's psychobabble and the acid rain rilling of Keith Levene, all three of them screaming like Brian Jones's hallucinogenic Japuka peripies over the dub pulse of Jah Wobble and PIL's drummer of the day (Jim Walker, I believe).

Be careful what you wish for, they say, because here is the nearest we will ever come to that 'what if?' fantasy spawned by the brief convergence of post-punk rock and improvisation in the messy, hectic late 1970s. In full tilt gentleman adventurer mode now that he has his own label, Jah Wobble is setting up sessions like a demon. What both players bring to this particular date (and there is an air of jazz blowing dates about these enterprises) is massive authority. A master of deception, Parker makes a virtue of easing into a piece, assessing the situation, deciding on a course of action. Like a shy man entering a crowded room at a party, he gives the impression that he's going to bolt for that safe spot by the cooler in the kitchen at the first opportunity and hide there all night. Within moments of these tremulous, uncertain beginnings, however, he storms to the centre of the action and holds his ground against all-comers.

As for Wobble, his rhythmic acuity is supernatural. He is on the one, up for the down stroke, rising from the bottom to the top. A clash of two such strong-minded individuals can be catastrophic, but Parker and Wobble are tea and chocolate together. Parker's granular, pitted tone on tenor and hyper-glossical soprano contrasting magnificently with Wobble's lowdown, rubbery bass. Their rhythmic approach also defends opposite ends of the pitch. Parker worries at phrases, tearing them to thin strips, circling round for another bite, never quite settling. Wobble saunts on a riff like the Soto Zen monk Ryokan sitting on a stone, absorbed by the beauty of the moon.

This is not just a lucky jam session, however. Wobble has clearly distinguished two core strengths in Parker's playing and shaped a propitious setting for them. Repetition is the more obvious of these qualities. With his deep explorations into circular breathing, long lines and small yet insistent variations in timbre, pitch and articulation, Parker closely aligns himself to theories and practices of trance. The repetition of Wobble's music, born out of his absorption of, dub and dark

Music (see Ephraïm, *The Wire* 203), accentuates a delicious intoxication with lyrical movement through air and time, an invisible calligraphy, in Parker's playing otherwise only implicit in solos and improvised groupings. Most people who have the chance to hear La Monte Young's unreleased recording "Sunday Morning Blues", respond by saying it sounds like Evan Parker jamming with The Velvet Underground. *Passage To Hades* is not quite that, but there are moments when it's close enough.

The other element that Wobble highlights is Parker's profound sense of connection to a global continuum in reed playing, vocalisation and other remarkable instrumental technologies and techniques documented by anthropologists, sound recordists and travellers. His intercultural Synergetics project is a proactive aspect of that, a practical and social interest in developing a global language of improvisation with like-minded souls, but there is a more subjective web of links to be drawn from the signature of his personal approach. There may be powerful echoes of John Coltrane and Giant Steps sounding throughout this CD, even Pharoah Sanders's "Upper Egypt & Lower Egypt" from *Touhid*, but more strongly than those venerable inspirations I can hear the taqira dannels of the Yawakapt Indians of Upper Xingu, the free reed bamboo pipes of Cambodia, the giant nadhaswaram oboes of India, the tang-piri oboe of Korea, the hidink of Japanese gagaku, the sacred flutes of Papua New Guinea and the bagpipes of Eastern Europe.

From the launching pad of Wobble on bass and Mark Sanders on drums, the rest of the group takes off for regions mapped into a speculative world where land masses shift to join Lamaist Tibet and medieval Europe to the Mississippi Delta, the Cordilleras Mountains of Cambodia and the Rif Mountains of northern Morocco. Jean-Pierre Raské's skirling bagpipes and harsh squalling on rauschpfeife are particularly effective, as are Olive Bell's Pi Saw flute from Thailand and his rather surprising Country blues harmonica.

At times, it's as if bastardised and accelerated backing tracks for Tappan Zuke's *Non Ah Worrior* have fallen into the hands of the ghost of David Munrow and his Early Music Consort Of London. If that makes *Passage To Hades* sound like some ghastly p-p-p-p-postmodern genre stach up then I'm falling in my 'job'. There is a long tradition of this type of "free jazz rides a groove" thing. Archie Shepp, John Stevens, Albert Ayler, Alice Coltrane, John Coltrane, Pharoah Sanders, Don Cherry, Miles Davis, The Art Ensemble, Sun Ra, Sonny Sharrock, Clifford Thornton and Ornette Coleman all recorded glorious examples. Only last year, Derek Bailey made the disconcertingly fabulous *Miroku*, with harmolodic funksters Jamsaadeen Tacuma and Calvin Weston. Jah Wobble and Evan Parker have added another classic to the canon. All things considered, this is my favourite pairing of unlikely talents since the recent issue of *Impressions Of A Patch Of Blue* by Walt Dickerson and Sun Ra.

DAVID TOOP

recorded their guitar meeting. *Dwelling Close* Atomics: Each remains obdurately himself yet a staggeringly tense dialogue unfolds. Hano's noises are splintered, a succession of whines, grunts, gurgles, maybe even words too. The per funt ways of condensing on the fly sudden turns when they produce sounds with the same raucosity or a similar pitch and mutually intoned pauses. Elsewhere they approach each other tangentially, even combatively. Hano wrenches out of himself the equivalent of the body in psychedelic light, veering off into strange densities and strange inner movements. Surges of expressionist force dissolve into an utterly incommunicable blank physicality. Bailey is spiky throughout and keenly attentive to Hano's motions. His style is immensely adaptable but centered around a rich core vocabulary. Some of his greatest successes of the last couple of years are very different in style — the nuanced feedback of *Strong Theory*, the delicacy of the mainly acoustic *Tides Fades And Dred She Demons* and the tremendous *Joseph Holbrooke* album — yet the strongest language he speaks is instantly recognizable. Some duos are about finding a common idiom; this is of another kind. Bailey's colonoid and Hano's guttural remain distinct, and the power of the music emerges from the tenacity with which each holds his ground. Jagged and raw, it blows clichés of ecstatic intensity out of the water. In the end it is in the most inexpressible sense, what you'd expect from these unlikeliest of musicians.

WILL MONTGOMERY

## Franz Hautzinger

Comberg Quartetensemble Trumpet Solo  
GROU 21112

Hot on the heels of Greg Kiley's magnificent Trumpet comes another meeting solo CD that recovers that instrument's potential from the point of view of its physical structure and the mental processes of sounding it. Hautzinger has previously been heard with alto saxophonist and fellow Austrian Wolfgang Puchner, and with his own quartet and trio. The degree of exposure on Comberg is far more intense, subjecting the trumpetist's extraordinarily intimate exploration of his quarter-tone horn to anthropologic scrutiny. The rhythms of breath, fluttering of the tongue, salivation, modifications of embouchure form the actual substance rather than merely the means of achieving Hautzinger's music. Loud, incisive and pliant events become its vocabulary, assuming microtonal identities. Trumpeting is reduced to infernal parables, somewhat like the attenuation of voice in Henri Chopin's sound poetry. Only without comparable electronic mediation. The level for each of the six pieces was clearly set high to capture every nuance. Occasional environmental sounds sneak in from the natural world: the human world urban locations. But listening to this weird

document you're effectively inside the trumpet's bell like a Jules Verne character wearing a conch shell as a diving helmet, and extraneous noise, even when identifiable and mundane (voices, traffic) becomes strange.

JULIAN COMLEY

## Hugh Hopper

Parabolic Versions Songs By Hugh Hopper  
VOCENTR VHC025 CD

## Hopper 5 Klossner

Cryptids  
B-1000T BP337 CD

First encountering the track "Dada Was Here" on Soft Machine's second album was one of the truly significant moments of my listening life. I still experience a twinge of that real wonder whenever I hear it. Compositionally the song is attributed to the group's bassist, Hugh Hopper, although arranged, crucially by drummer Robert Wyatt. Subsequently, in the early 70s, Hopper would become as earnest as the next Proton-usurping progressive jazz-rockster, but it was comforting to know that his favourite single was "Papa's Got A Brand New Bag." His 1972 solo venture, 1984 showed an idiosyncratic take on Terry Riley's tape delay technique: decidedly avant garde in those days. Yet the fact remained that Hopper had a flair for writing the odd good song: not least "Memories" now a near standard, which Wyatt recorded with painful sincerity, and which Whyton Houston later covered (with Archie Shepp) as a guest singer with Material.

The course of Hopper's music: maelstrom during the intervening decades is somewhat chequered, but his current creative partnership with Bob 5 Klossner marks a high point, sustained into their second album. Klossner's intelligent, troubled lyrics and better-than-weave voice allow Hopper to pursue his interest in oblique yet palpable song structures, imaginatively arranged. Cryptids is not just a collection of discrete songs: rather Hopper, Klossner and their players build a complex mood and explore its various facets. The pool of musicians includes Elton Dean, who contributes alto to one piece. Pip Pyle, drumming with evident passion. Gary Smith, whose moose stereo guitar forms a particularly effective foil to Hopper's fuzz bass and trombonist Robert Jones, who cultivates an air of mature reflection, enhanced by Christine Jeter's trumpet and the flute of Crystalline Blanc-Laurie. Cryptids has a feel of sophistication and musical wit that's all too rarely encountered, one thinks of the best of Annie Peacock's solo work, or John Greaves and Peter Blegvad's classic *New Phone*.

Parabolic Versions: his title from the lyrics of "Dedicated To You But You Weren't Listening" another Hopper contribution to *The Soft Machine: Volume Two*. The CD compiles songs from *Hugh Hopper And Dada Friends* (1993), *Hooligan Romantics* (1994), and *Somewhere In France* (1996) plus four

formerly-unreleased tracks, and it illustrates well what constitutes a patchy decade. The quatercentennial Canterbury voice of Richard Sinclair sinks the right note on the opening "Long Lines Autumn Time", and Robert Wyatt is as winning as ever on a closing version of "Was A Friend". In between lie a number of troughs, John Atkinson's theatrical and frankly undistinguished vocal approach anchors Hopper too firmly in pedestrian forms. Los Klossner's appearance on the three other previously-unheard tracks signals the upward trend which has now resulted in the excellent *Cryptids*.

JULIAN COMLEY

## Phil James

Already Gaze  
SPARKS 0504HWS SP80021 CD

## Seomron

Seomron  
SPARKING SEOMRON SP80022 CD

Two albums from Sparkling Seomron, a label based in Columbia, Missouri, with a strong interest in both Japanese and experimental music. Both are reflected in Phil James's Ambient pieces, which generate an elegiac mood by layering shakuhachi drones over returned harmonium, turntables and discreet electronics. James has a taste for machines that huff and puff in an almost human way. Apart from his harmoniums, which he retunes to Chinese scales, he sometimes seems to be cranking a handle on some leathery mechanical antique rescued from the garden shed. The resultant creaking and thumping is used as a rhythmic basis to support distant drones and breathy flute melodies. The flutes shine a light over what is mainly a dark and organic texture, in keeping with James's intention to compose memorial music for friends who have died young. His attempts to create a very personal soundworld are intriguing, though maybe not consistently successful. Averaging eight minutes, several tracks could benefit from trimming. The fourth, "Analest", replaces drift with a sense of structure and surprise, suddenly foregrounding a bizarre piano dance. Elsewhere, the intensity is intermittent, and not helped by somewhat brutal flute playing. Seomron are a youthful ensemble who all play the koto, the 13 string Japanese zither. "Urume" is a colourful Okinawan fantasy, shimmering koto harmonics unexpectedly softer into an imitation of the shamisen, as if grand pianos playing homage to a baroque cotelewa. A voice is evoked by tremolo koto, the wooden instrument bodies are called on for percussion, and then the whole ensemble slips over further south to conjure up a gamelan. Given the normally closed-in nature of the Japanese classical music world, this piece by Tedio Sewar shows what an outward-looking and modern approach Seomron have. Merely Japanese with a sprinkling of Westerners, the group are all

# Tresor.

Drum Sequence II  
test, Blake Baxter  
The Collective  
DO-CD-DO-EP 56163-2/3 Tresor/160



Dave Tarrida  
Paranoid  
CD-DO-EP 56161-2/3 Tresor/161



## Dave Tarrida on Tour:

- 03.08.01 Test (Glasgow/Scotland)
- 03.08.01 Doornik (Nijmegen/Holland)
- 17.08.01 La Cava (Barcelona/Spain)
- 22.08.01 Pilsbo (Edinburgh/Scotland)
- 24.08.01 Super 8 (Paris/Germany)
- 24.08.01 U 0351 (Frankfurt/Germany)
- 25.08.01 Skarmheim (Kassel/Germany)
- 27.08.01 Tresor (Berlin/Germany)
- 16.09.01 O.S. Maa (Dortmund/Germany)
- 24.09.01 L.C. Incubator (Groningen/Spain)
- 25.09.01 Metro (Alcala/Spain)

## Singles

Jeff Mills  
Metropolis 2  
MS 56158-6 Tresor/155

Drum Sequence III  
test, Blake Baxter  
FM Disko  
MS 56159-6 Tresor/159

Dave Tarrida  
Paranoid (Again)  
MS 56162-6 Tresor/162



UK distribution by SPD



Irony in the soul: 2nd Gen's Wajid Yaseen

## 2nd Gen

Irony Is

NOVA/UTE NOVA/UTE CD

## 2nd Gen

And/Or EP

NOVA/UTE NOVA/UTE CD

2nd Gen is Wajid Yaseen, and his first full-length album *Irony Is* is one of those occasional records so certain of itself that it can be a little unnerving to listen to — so much so that I mistook it for Panacea having come over all HipHop. The same zealousness infects both artists, as do the streams of white noise, channelled into flows of beats and bass. All approaches are welcome here, so long as they keep

on the harder end of the beat spectrum. Fusing the more militant energies of darkcore, electro, and Industrial with HipHop beats lends the album an exhilarating 'fuck you'-ness. However, the main point Yaseen and Panacea share, in keeping with each of the genres just listed, is a keen ear for hadineyed melodrama used with such sincere belief that over-familiar clichés are infused with a renewed vitality.

The key track for this has to be "Black Spring", a collaboration with James Johnston of Gallon Drunk. A door swings closed, he walks across the empty room, picks up the guitar, blows his harmonica, and there you are in the midst of yet another Marlboro Man roadhouse anthem. But it's not long before it mutates into something quite different. Until now, I had never heard a blues/noise crossover, but it is done with such skill that it is hard to imagine that harmonica and guitar have ever been coupled with anything as successfully as these feedback loops, frequency squalls and distorted, blunted beats.

On "Slowburn" co-conspirator Mau is brought in to MC over clanking beats and the sound of 100 kettles letting off steam. A constant shift between uncomfortably raw insights into social truths and tautologies narrate the trauma of otherness, specifically post-colonialism, as a process of being stripped of subjectivity. When he says "only of my weakest do I try to understand", he recognises that he is taking refuge in anger because analysis makes him feel too vulnerable. His acknowledgement that the problem is not singular but simultaneously exterior and interior to himself is a truth that, no matter how painful, he cannot deny. Mapped onto the experience of otherness is the double bind of

language which, in this case, restricts communication rather than enables it. His struggle to find the right words is echoed by his faltering enunciation, like trying to convey complexity in an unfamiliar language. The nihilism is such that the middle verse is left unspoken and the possibility of redemption is banished by the closing line, "When I die no one will remember me/not even me."

The tension of the double bind is at the core of each track. On "Scarred" the slow thrust of the kick drum and a snare's clash marks a rhythm that is so basic and ordered that when other sound breaks in it can only exist as bursts of noise, counterposing the logic of the grid. Throughout the album, sinuous and aggressive machismo is carried up by operatic flourishes of melodrama. This is especially true of the title track where a Four Horsemen sound of distorted breakdowns has to pause for breath with a few bars of nosedived Techno, an S&M squeal of joyous pain, followed by blasting sirens. Taken on their own, each is just a corny endgame, but when layered to such excess each cliché can't help but be loaded with irony and become exhilaratingly indulgent.

Given the recent treatment on the *And/Or* EP, the heady mix of sincerity and absurdity is tested. Cold Kid and Techno Animal keep the spirit of things with the standard issue distorted beats while cleaning up the track and taming it. Techno Animal offers the track with daik's rhyming. However, Si Beggs/BuddiKunk 3000's remix strips it right down to a cerebral Ambient breakbeat deconstruction where all distortion and excess is removed with clinical, and surprisingly economical, success.

BEN BORTHWICK

pupils of Icto virtuoso Sawa. The album was recorded in Tokyo and all compositions are for between three and seven kotos. Standards of playing and ensemble are very high, and the range of colours extraordinary. Notoshio Masaki's fine "The Gate In The Mist" creates strange impressionistic effects — underwater beating in mal Debussy's underwater cathedral? — The six pieces here, including one composed by group member Britt Lauer feature plenty of shifting contrasts between fortitude and delicacy. Now it would be fascinating to see what a composer like Harold Budd would produce from this group.

CLIVE BELL

## Jan Jelinek

Loop-Finding-Jazz-Records

SCALE 001 CD

Even as glitched House/microscopic tendencies appear to solidify and fall together into some sort of an ordered pattern, and the Ovalis and Sade's converge into what feels suspiciously like a scene, it's worth bearing in mind the methodological differences underlying these artists' practices.

Sure, the computer is at the centre of most of their studios, and the onomatopoeic click a staple of their shared aesthetic, but the similarities mostly end there. What's so striking about Jan Jelinek's newest project then, isn't necessarily the sound — deep, dubby subdued Tech House wash in clicks and static — but the way he made it. As the title suggests, *Loop-Finding-Jazz-Records* is constructed entirely out of looped samples culled from jazz records (specifically from the 50s and 70s, though it makes little difference in the case). Works away from Acid Jazz, however, Jelinek has abstracted his sources beyond recognition, losing his misheard samples into flickering patterns of sonic noise laid into a dub Techno framework.

"Rock In The Video Age" with its vaguely vanguardist inflected tones comes closest to an actual jazz quotation, but that's probably an identification in hindsight. Jelinek might as well have sampled a horn player's heaving intake of breath — it would have been 'jazzy' enough for his purposes. This is jazz shorn of any instrument's individual signature, much less any stylistic reference. If there's any signature here, it's Jelinek's own less-punchy than his electrified Tech House in Farnen, it shores

more of the compressed mid-tones of his Grammy work. Deep, muddy beats underpin the CD — the most obvious reference to Jelinek's affiliation with Pole — but the density of his middle range, impossibly murky yet flecked with treble highlights, is unmistakably his own creation. There's no point in dissecting individual tracks, they're all variations on a common theme, all weighed down with a sensory affinity heretofore. And all share the same refusal to be tied down to their source offering only glimpses — like catching the frame of a film in the blink of an eye.

PHILIP SHEPHERD

## Lee Konitz

Some New Stuff

DWE 919 CD

Chicago born Lee Konitz has an interesting past. A founder member of cool jazz in the 40s, his foggy, nasal sound and exuberantly argued lines — a 'Hell Torque' of the alto sax

have graced music by Claude Thornhill, Lennie Tristano, Stan Kenton, Carlo Bley, Joseph Holbrooke and Company. Here he's supported by two tyros of downtown, bassist

Grieg Cohen and drummer Joey Baron. Konitz always plays with dignity, and here he goes for a raw, eclectic, tonalistic production that suits the melodic line, some of his soloing. The cover sports a painting by Dennis Burton which portrays Jasper Johns's games with letters and space. This package is NYC retro-plus overdrive.

Although the deftness of the playing is exemplary, the net impression is unrelentingly of different tightness and cramped ambience. Cohen and Baron usually play outside the times set, and they even resist the polyrhythmic exuberance and funk that aren't appropriate. One can see why downliners should wish to pay tribute to cool, but when musicians of the scope of Cohen and Baron trim their cloth to the interim, it sounds mannered exactly the same problem occurs with Wynton Marsalis rhythm sections can't help being contemporary, and they sound wrong with 'turn back the clock' soloists. Now, Konitz's Saxophone Dreams recorded in 1988 and 1992 with The Netherlands' Muziek Orchestra (regulators on Light Music radio) that did sound convincing.

BEN WATSON

## Kymatik

Dis-Air-Stuff Vol 1

PARADIGM 15 CD

Dis-Air-Stuff Vol 1 features four lengthy pieces, two of which are built on fearfully executed drones. These man works are interspersed with delicate environmental recordings: bees, crickets in the wind, a trailer leaving a harbour. The word 'Kymatik' derives from the Greek for wave. *Amo*, as applied by Swiss physicist Hans Jenny, whose research led him to put sound to therapeutic uses. The pieces on Dis-Air-Stuff were conceived with three-speakered ambisonics in mind — surround sound is a Kymatik preoccupation, though it can obviously only be aspired to on a regular stereo CD. Kymatik brings interests in bioenergetics, psychodiscs and physics to bear on its work. Musically his reference points include Ayin Lacer, Pauline Oliveros and Roland Kayn.

The first of these rich soundscapes, 'Dents for Mice', has the greatest range of sound inputs. A succession of heavily treated unfold sounds passes, as a wandering narrative unfolds over 17 minutes. It is carefully constructed but it lacks the feeling of accumulating intensity of the other long pieces on the CD. More involving is the 'Excerpt From Kandinsky's *Im Blue*'. This takes its total quality from a translation of the painting's colours into sonic information. It's essentially a spatialised drone traversed by other background notes, giving an endlessly shifting stereo image. Another track, dating from 1994, uses a spin dryer as sound source. As one might expect, it's a throbbing, whining piece overlaid with ever deeper loops and fragments of higher pitched sound. Gradually it becomes a grinding epic, writhing with hypnotic potential as, somehow, the body logic of Techno meets electroacoustic sound chattering.

The most substantial piece, though, is the culminating 'Lorene Attractor', which is 23 minutes long and is billed as: the result of ten years' work in psychodiscs and states of consciousness'. First a low tone comes to the fore. A soft chord is gradually built up. This constantly modulates as different elements dominate and the sounds are continually tweaked. Gradually higher pitches sharpening in tonal quality, are added incrementally, the contours beyond the audible range towards the end of the track. The piece communicates increasing pressure and intensity, and acquires a monolithic weight. Kymatik has also produced a surround sound version, which must be overwhelming. Even in simple stereo, it's an imposing listen and the listener is well advised on the CD sleeve, to *close all other activity*.

WILL MONTGOMERY

## Thomas Lehn

Feldstarium

BANDSOUND RECORDS R027.1.D

Thomas Lehn has become one of the more intriguing figures in European improvised music by establishing himself as an

instrumentalist, not an engineer. Unlike improvisers who use electronics to trigger indeterminacy, Lehn prefers the fine control offered by analogue synthesizers. This allows him the requisite responsiveness to interact with acoustic instrumentalists who share a sensibly based in precise articulation. As a result, Lehn has contributed to several durable recordings, one of which *Tom And Gerry* with percussionist Gerry Hemingway is one of the most cogent pairings of a contemporary music marvel and a jazz-affected improviser since Richard Teitelbaum's 1977 duet with Anthony Braxton, *Time Zones*.

Solo music draws upon a different set of instincts and skills, however. Raising this necessary item is partly dependent on the improviser's ability to make complete statements, which seems Lehn's intent in creating series entitled 'Feldstarium' and 'Tablaur'. Without relying on note syntax, this is particularly tricky with an analogue synthesizer, where many parameters of the music are essentially predetermined. Granted unless one intimately knows the EMS Synth A is all but impossible to evaluate the links Lehn takes and avoids. Regardless,

'Feldstarium' is a fascinating recording. Lehn repeatedly demonstrates that he can reel in the listener with prolonged howls that linger on the edge of audibility, or almost instantly overload the series. Throughout the programme, he conveys a discernible sense of form unfolding in real time.

Lehn also proves to be an adept album builder by placing his most abstract piece 'Feldstarium 2' just off centre: the seventh of 11 pieces. High frequency sounds slowly envelope, suggesting a hybrid between crickets and a small motor's squeaky fan belt. Pitchy blips and crackles are gradually introduced and spooled out with an almost Feldman-like languor to create a second layer of timbres and rhythms. The last several minutes of this 15 minute track (the album's longest) end elegantly into silence. Even if Lehn plotted it out to the nth degree, it would be an excellent piece of electronic music.

BILL SHEPHERD

## Marclay/Moore/Rinaldo

Rock Start Up

WOLFG 101 1.1

The teaming of the guitar axis from Sonic Youth with turntablist Clarence Marclay works to devastating effect in this live document from the 1999 *Music Actuelle* Festival in Carlsbad. Knowing their past, we might expect a 'bashing metal' mayhem. But this proven workout is almost a meditation — a sustained and complex journey through Hieronymus Bosch's musical hell. Every obnoxious vocal grows constantly, solid ground becomes a maelstrom, every character we meet proves a mischievous shapeshifting demon.

On *Rock Start Up* this powerful and communal mutation is achieved through technology — a liberal use of delay units, ring modulators

filters, loops, and guitar pedals — but largely through team interaction and the sheer excellence of the playing. Both Thurston Moore and Lee Ranaldo shine like incandescent stars — the result of their 20 year war against the clichéd sound of the guitar. There is no limit to their resourcefulness as they turn their guitars into screaming aliens. At one point Moore constructs a brief, free jazz-like riff from disjointed notes, trying to rebuke the memory of a Sonny Simmons sax solo out of steel strings and feedback.

Marclay's enthusiasm is for destruction and mischief. Every musical invention of the 20th century is fair to his mighty bottle. Through the flames he brings forth a phoenix of new music. All genres are dragged into his tumultuous — classical string quartets, orchestral as a church organ (Messiaen?), cocktail lounge jazz, Dowland crooners. The familiar instantly becomes strange. Worn vinyl fragments are tortured, loaded, sped up, smashed to pieces and deployed with heavy sarcasm: ironic counterpoints to the electric fencing duel fought by his two manicured cohorts.

"Pax Amour" kicks off with the audience exhorting Moore to "Fuck Shit Up!" Looking instantly into a three way nose-athon the trio happily comply. Tension is conjured out of nowhere and sustained for the next hour. Strange mixed sounds, peculiar stop in go dynamics and eerily quiet passages shift the musical direction every 90 seconds, with every improvised moment fuelled by a nihilistic glee. When it comes to fucking shit up, only The Boredoms can improve on this.

KE PINKNEY

## Ennio Morricone & Gruppo Di Improvvisazione Nuova Consonanza

Gli Occhi Freddi Della Paura. OST

DAV. 942.000 (10.15)

By film industry standards, Ennio Morricone's score for Enzo Casella's obscure 70s Italian movie *Gli Occhi Freddi Della Paura* must be regarded as a footnote in the career of a composer who has soundtracked some of the most celebrated blockbusters of his time. But it's one of his most amazing works for cinema, a stunning reworking of the thriller soundtrack genre that lies somewhere between his scores for Dario Argento's late 60s/early 70s schlock horror movies, *The Bird With The Crystal Plumage* and *The Cat O'Nine Tails*, and his contemporary work with the Italian improvising collective Gruppo Di Improvvisazione Nuova Consonanza.

Judging by the stills reproduced on the sleeve of this CD release, Casella's movie is an Argento-like psychosocial terrorism, an impression reinforced by the presence in the cast list of Aldo Ray, an actor whose on-camera presence carries such undertones of amorality and malice he makes John

out now on smells like records



**frozen pool cd**  
The rare and astonishing emotional range in Rosendahl's singing matches the subtle sophistication, musical motifs and lyrical themes of her songwriting. She has absorbed the cream of the Continental pop crop — particularly the work of '60s chanteuse Françoise Hardy — and wedded those elements to a subtly and sensibly folk-based sound.



**john wolfington cd**  
The debut album by "cinematic" multi-instrumentalist Wolfington on drums, drum loops, piano, Moog, bass, and Dr. Rhythm. With guest appearances by Steve Shafley and Tim Feltgen on over half the songs.

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# size matters

A new column for 3" 7" 10" and other misshapes

Though it's been here almost as long as full-length originals, the 3" CD is only now finding its place in the world next to 7" and 10" misshapes. The arena fringe has been quick to turn its embrace 18-20 minute format and diminished size into obscure objects of desire. French label Metamorphose's chattering 3" series *Cinema Pour L'Orléans* has evolved an admirable one-size-fits-all house aesthetic for its commissions. Previous volumes have included Jim O'Rourke, Walter Rattmann and Elton Ragaque. Last year brought the music concourse of **Placido Martusciello's** *Unsettled Line* (Metamorphose MKCDD07 3" CD) and **Jean-François Laporte's** *Monochrome* (MKCDD08 3" CD). Aptly titled, Martusciello's aerial cinema beats it as it squats your inner ear and projecting shattering sound events through the huffed up field of perception surrounding it. Laporte's disc is more a cement drone colored with spring metal. Irregularly phased volume and velocity changes periodically shift the core noise's centers of gravity, causing them to strike accidental chords and clouds of reverb off each other.

As Kenny Rogers and Dolly Parton told us we are sounds in the stream. This especially rings true for bedroom electronic musicians who release their drinkings on disconnected "handbells." The *Archipelago* is a loosely structured alignment of stylistically and geographically scattered musicians floating around the Bay Area's seismism and beyond. Their series of six 3" CDs is called, unsurprisingly, *Islands*, each with a different title. *Don Lunnie's* *Archipelago* (#3/1 3" CD) **Rhonda** is a duo of Nathan Kresberg and Michael Bentley's explore Lunar landscapes via particularized drones and anti-gravity synth duos that are vaguely reminiscent of Anthony Manning. Their deep space orientation comes into clear focus when you learn their career was kickstarted by Holcom Cool of Toronto's Expanding Head Band. *Finis of e1's* *Orchestra* (you know who you are) might be perturbed by the presence of a human voice on *Click Pop* (Archipelago #3/6 3" CD). Where *Orchestra* explored the literal and theoretical hypenamespace inside a Powerbook, *Click Pop* is more of an effort to impose the computer's binary crinkle logic on the real world.

**Theriac's** *Spore* (Archipelago #3/4) 3" CD) begins with the sound of Hanoi's conquering Europe with an army of insects instead of demons before soothing into 18 minutes of *Deconstruct* play programming the blues. *Discs* by Cervo, Sefelon and Dean Santorini complete the set.

The 3" time frame reminds explorers of shrewlike oceans when to come up for air 20 minutes each of **Osamu Yoshitake's** *Digital Translucence* (1st 3" CD) and **Sachiko Miyoshi's** *IFPM Sound Factory* (016 3" CD) and *Delect* (IFPM Sound Factory 016 3" CD) and *Delect* (IFPM Sound Factory 016 3" CD) leave you gasping for more. Osamu's disc more explicitly leans between serene and snarling and snarling digital screams across expanse of emptiness. This pair of Sachiko releases are more restrained and remarkable for that. If the serene movement on *Delect* is so controlled it amounts to a claustrophobic exercise in flattening the sonic soundings of *Delect* bounce back offensive distorted Meitzi signals.

David C. guitars **Bruce Russell** moves further into the lonesome territory nipped out on his solo *Sabbatree* disc with a 10" of live tape-loop and guitar interactions. *The Movement Of The Free Spot* (Smalltown Soundsource no number 10"), which lists its title from *Seutonai Raoul Vanegem's* account of the millenarian sects of the Middle Ages, is an ultra-heavy outing with the screech of speed tape looping like a car crash as Russell takes up with chaotic detouring guitar noise. How sense-depriving drone, the time from **Neil Campbell's** *Vibacattract Orchestra* spinning off into two features for a split 7" *The Vibacattract Drum Project* (The Vibacattract) *Shiny Band Freedom From No Number 7"* While the *Shiny Band* disc stays with the long psychoactive tones of their more orchestral incarnation, the *Drum Project* releases a tumbling storm with misty floor tones, accompanied by bells, metal and lock-downing.

The image on the cover of *Uro-Vivolo* (UKD 05 3" CD) by **celia Frances-Purle** **UKD** and electronic sound design **Stephen Virella** shows a camel wandering in a humped landscape. The music is all curious reiterations, offered without commentary or explanation. In the course of its myopically 20 minute piece, fragments of melody drift nomadically across abstract acoustic spaces. A numbing electronic duet, lit up by crackling arcs of sparks, surrounds. Utters whispering, ghostly figures, which are accumulated early on by their vulnerable voice vocalizer and culminate in her instrument's bedlike texture. *Virella's* electric guitar is bowed and otherwise cajoled into dialogue with the cello. It's rarely easy to tell who is doing what, there's such fundamental convergence between the players. *Reviewed by* Julian Cowley David Kramon, Bob Katz and Peter Shapiro

Melkovich took the Tom Hanks. Unusually and farcically, the score is performed by Monticone and the members of Nuova Concordia, and perhaps as a consequence it seems to draw more overtly than any of Monticone's other filmworks on a background that encompasses the surrealism of European improv music and the rigorous experiments in sound that defined post-War modern composition.

As far as his work for the cinema is concerned, what Monticone offered from electroacoustic improvising groups such as Musica Elettronica Viviva which had been active in Rome since the mid-60s and composers such as Cage, Stockhausen, Sculgi and Berio, was a way to uncover new approaches to the organization of sound as well as the deployment of exotic sound sources and generators in order to undercut the conventions of the film-music soundtrack. Here, that enhance combines with the pragmatic, whatever it takes, aesthetic of film music to produce 16-bit state soundworlds that on one level could be heard as a rogue offshoot of pop music. In fact they are a brilliant abstraction of the essence of noise.

The performances agitate the molecules of the score into a state of rage of the seat suspense. Percussive clicks rattles and thruts fuzz-wal-gate (cinemaphon) bowed cymbals, scraped piano strings, wash trumpet plus electronic processing adding rings of reverb and echo are orchestrated to produce a mood of existential menace. Some pieces such as the jaw-dropping opening track *Seguete* suddenly break into hair-raising chaotic scene jazz, but the momentum of the driving bassdrum parts is in full caped by the virtuosic soloing arrangements. This CD is a part of the Italian Dagbladet label's ongoing series of Italian film music releases. The most recent batch includes two further rare Monticone soundtracks from the 70s: *Stavros* and *Il Pulviscolo Dei Segreti* (Contra) both contain moments of brilliance from the maestro. But this one feels extra special despite the fact that the stereotypes are beyond salacious.

If the recent *Jackie* rescue of John Zorn's *The Big Gun* isn't quite your world all over again, then seek this out: it's the real killer **TOM HERRINGTON**

## Tizisio Muñoz

*Asapocuous Hesling*

MAINTAINING (C)

Whatever you make of Muñoz's effusive sortuality, his music goes straight for the solar plexus. Hurling him prop open the doors of enlightenment on *Asapocuous Hesling* are fellow guitarist Henry Kaiser, pianist Marilyn Crossell, bassist Mark Dresser and drummer Lukas Ligeti. On paper alone that line-up merits the exclamation mark. As ever, it's an ecstatically melodic cascade from start to finish and very much the leader's vehicle, but the internal structuring of his music has rarely

sounded so well formed.

The accompanying quartet is running off the same dynamo, gravitating stylistically to Muñoz with the readiness of musicians steeped for long periods in John Coltrane's oronic outpourings. Ligeti traces the guitarist's tracks, laying down rhythmic markers or sending out cymbal spray while Dresser's ferrous strength holds the centre steady. Crossell sees the opportunity to run the risk of sounding like a highly disciplined individual in embellished playing that suits the context perfectly. Kaiser shadows Muñoz, occasionally inserting bits that suggest there might be other paths testing turned.

Tiles of individual presence were largely an irrelevance at least during the period of initial learning. Track follows track in a continuous surge. The penultimate piece does, however, arrest the attention as Muñoz launches into Brahms's *Lullaby*. The opening bars are enough to raise hairs that the entire troupe of celestial commuters is about to become engulfed in a tide of spirit, but all seems out with some of the loudest playing on the record drives the spiky flow into a clear sublimating stream. There's a peculiarly thin line between ecstasy and exorcism, but in this company, more than ever, Muñoz stays on the right side of the divide.

**JULIAN COWLEY**

## Toshimaru Nakamura

*No Input Mixing Board*

2046 (Jazzology) (C) (C)

## Repeat

select dialect

CUT OUT (C)

The title of *No-Input Mixing Board* is exactly describes Toshimaru Nakamura's working methods. All his sounds are generated from feedback from within his mixing board. Much as his occasional collaborator Sachiko M has explored the soundmaking potential of the round sampler, Nakamura builds his music around the greshly lesser of a real-time's sounds. *No-Input Mixing Board* is his first solo album. Despite the wealth of the sounds he produces, there's an unsurprising claustrophobia to the results. A former guitarist, he's part of the minimal strand of the post-war Japanese avant garde. However, though he uses a Spoutan sound palette, Nakamura tends to insert a restless mobility to his pieces. Nothing runs over eight minutes. The tracks stand there starkly, veiled and fade away, as he subtly plays with the competing demands of motion and stasis. Some are built around a single throbbing tone while others depend on chopped up sounds arranged in brief loops. In the end, though, it's not so much the shifting micro-narratives that pull in the listener as the granby beauty of the sounds he produces.

Repeat is Nakamura's Berlin-based duo with American musician Jason Kahn, who works with drums, metals and electronics. Nakamura

is more muted than on *No-nout*. *Ming Board* and the two interlark in ways that suggest an intense musical affinity. Kahn brings in a huge variety of sounds from thudding backbeats to pecked, high-pitched chimes, coming in at inimitable obscure angles that offset *Naikemura's* haunted tones. Like his partner he's drawn to small gestures and repetition. All the pieces are single ideas worked up and developed over a few minutes. The album is just as rich and persuasive as the *Naikemura's* solo release sharing a similar vision—narrow focus music that's definitively provisional.

**WILL HORTON/RET**

## Neuro

I Need Drugs

PHONO • JAGGED, JMBB 16 CD

Shock lyrics! *Neuro's* *I Need Drugs* represents the middle ground between Company Flow's dark musty-rap B-P and the controversial neurosis of Eminem. *Neuro* is an angry, white New York rapper who produces his own dark and twisted beats, and raps with a horrorcore style on all aspects of extreme social deviance. *I Need Drugs* presents an able and forceful MC, creative and fresh producer, and confused and angry personality all wrapped up in one highly combustible package.

As an MC, he's lighting quick and complex rhymes that never slow in their relentless rhythmic attack. Many times, his quick cadence and references seem to shadow box with Eminem. However, he harbors his own psychoses with a gleefully cannibal vocal style, unlike Eminem's visceral anger. The title track parodies LL Cool J's *B.O.B.s* hit "I Need Love," mimicking the style but subverting the lyrics with very black humor. On "You're Dead," he admits "I've got a gun to pull/and I'm comfortable/Runnin' a full clip into the wonderful front of your skull/Your life is not reversible, scramble into the underworld."

Perhaps *Neuro's* real talent lies not in his G.I.T. lyrics, but in his stark, dirty and raw production. Backward loops, doomy piano, snarling scratches and occasional wails add a charged atmosphere to his disgusting lyrics. *I Get Down On My Knees*, taken as name from a 60s soul sample deconstructed to produce his inscription with relative fear, the closest album to swallow for should that be soft. *Neuro's* by any means, he reveals raw and manicured lyrical agility, despite his monstrous subject matter.

**JOH WELDON**

## Pascals

Flawless

FLAWLESS • JAGGED, JMBB 16 CD

*Pascal Comelade* takes the me as a protest musician—in an accordion tube and plastic guitar protest against drabness. Against music, which turns its back on melody, against using technology to reduce colour and playfulness. A France-based Catalan: Comelade's Bel

Canto Orchestra employs toys and streetband playing to create the warm atmosphere of carnival. Along with the Penguin Cafe Orchestra and The Ukulele Orchestra Of Great Britain, Comelade goes down very well in Japan—who knows why? Because Japanese pop is even more emasculated and over-packaged than ours? Because a certain naivety is valued?

The Pascals are a 15-piece Japanese group formed by pianist Rikoto Matsui in homage to Pascal Comelade and this is their first release. At first devoted to Comelade's tunes, since forming in 1995 they have broadened their ambitions to include original material. *Flawless* is a handful of cover versions (Brian Auger & The Trinity, a cover of Comelade's "Mandolin"), the Pascals sound as all their own: a ramshackle but attractive mélange of mandolins, cellos, handbell, panpipes and glockenspiel, with occasional commentary from a chorus of boys, sweetly and otherwise at the back of the class. Their inevitable version of Henry Mancini's "Moon River" features saw and piano, duelling the melody over a strolling rhythm, pared later by extremely Japanese rough-edged vocals: a style maybe harking back to Tokyo music hall entertainers.

The fact is, in spite of their European inspiration, The Pascals are somehow unmistakably Japanese. The opening "Samba" though more tropical, funeral march than samba, displays how they balance the sweet, the exotic and the unpolished. "Past" branches out into pop territory, an aching anthem with a C&W lilt. The group may have 15 members, but the sound is intimate, and they show more tendency to melancholy than their mentor Comelade. Fans of the late lamented Penguin Cafe Orchestra, awaiting the next incarnation of that musical spirit, need look no further.

**CLIVE BELL**

## Annette Peacock

An Acrobat's Heart

PHONO • JAGGED

It's been 12 years since Annette Peacock's 1981 album, the excellent funk-driven, minimalist political manifesto, *Abstract-Concept*. This joy has been filled partly by the 1997 double-disc set by the Marilyn Crispell Trio. *Neuro's* Eyes: *Abstract-Concept*. Now recently reissued to the taste of New York (her birthplace) after nearly two decades of living in England, Peacock made *An Acrobat's Heart* at the prompting of ECM's Manfred Eicher, who commissioned her to write new songs for her voice and piano alongside the strings of The Canada String Quartet.

This work is consequently her most loved to date: with only a little unlearned piano embellishment here and there. Beautiful but at the same time strangely subliminal, it contrasts sharply with "Ellekt Yourself," the upbeat seducing rap about self-empowerment, politics and power on her last

album. This is the output of someone withdrawing from the world, lost in reverie and reflection. Yes, with characteristic insightfulness, she recognizes that this is futile. "There's no gain when we escape. The proof of past forever more, hanging next to us to score the time that's lost. We can't resist."

With her unconventional phrasing, the crystalline arrangements being, by turns, ambiguity and pugnacity in her starkly emotional songs, not darning them of passion but imbuing them with a resigned detachment. Though there are some upbeat lyrics here—confident about love in the present and dealing with despair—this is considerably more introspective and less exuberant than some of her work.

On "Miss Peacock," Peacock, now unbelievably in her 60th year, sings, "I made my own music, for right or for wrong" as a metaphor for how she has lived her life. But it's also true in a literal sense: in one sound like *Annette*.

**PHIL ENGLAND**

## Ruins

Pallaschroom

PHONO • JAGGED

It's now 14 years since The Ruins, a home brand of hardcore Prog cartoon pop, ups, lets, saw the light of vinyl, yet drummer Tatsuya Yoshida said hasn't been able to patent his tubed train to MIDI interface. The problem is that the Magma-verse or Vanderson or whatever else it is that has allowed him to plug a series of bass players directly into his profoundly contorted, not to say Prog-adjacent, brainwaves, is still locked into a perpetual fast forward. And true to form Pallaschroom again finds the Japanese bass and drums duo handwired into their customary brand of rapid-fire, quick-change tempo and taste defying antics.

This album begins in classic Ruins mode with Pigma's entire output stripped to its core: debated, distorted and compressed into two minute bursts of high octave surges. The astonishing virtuosity of these two players locked together like mixing bowls can at times yield one of the most perplexing aesthetic experiences. Such incomprehension over the technical impossibility of their loss-precision aural acrobatics leaves the faculties brayed bewildered and in a state of freeplay.

But as with any Ruins release, the unanswerable question of how they do what they do is always lampshaded by the more perplexing question as to why they do it? Like why on earth did they choose to conclude the album with "Classical Music Medley 2," its ostensibly a companion piece to their staple live encore "Prog Rock Medley," as documented on the outtakes album *Refused Fossil*. Here, however, they travel through snippets of classical music from no fewer than 26 composers and all in the space of 75 seconds. In all honesty, it's high time the Magma-verse just hied.

**STEPHEN ROBINSON**



72/0111 shutles350 for 10



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72/0111 shutles350 for 10

(Ambient)

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Looked at one way this is

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but looked at another way, we have

1+(1+1)+(1+1+1)+...=1!

Grandi discovered this series in 1703; he claimed that God must have used a technique based on this series in order to create Something from Nothing, and thus get the cosmos going. This is not really as insane as it sounds - a more sophisticated way of saying something similar would be to claim that the cosmos is a moiré, an interference pattern produced by a wave function out of phase with itself."

Thanks to Rudy Rucker \*

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## Senking

Thrill

PISTER-NOTON/BOHEVITY

## Mokira

Cleptop

PISTER-NOTON/BOHEVITY

The fourth and fifth instalments in Paster-Noton's Suite series maintain the labels' classic concept packaging aesthetic. A coloured card containing the CD information is visible through a semi-reflective yet transparent oversized plastic envelope that feels like a ziplock bag. Each is emblazoned with a caution about static in a style reminiscent of warnings about exposure to radioactivity. While the packaging may be a nice idea, there is a frustrating degree of style over content. I almost destroyed the inlay card trying to get it out for a better look, and after repeated listenings the CDs were covered in fingerprints from pulling the damn things out of the bags.

Yet both releases live up to their aspirations to be part of the Suite series, if in very different ways. Andreas Tzander's Mokira focuses on high end pops and clicks to build each track. Cleptop is the more clinical and restrained set. Its best tracks are minimal abstractions that recall the Ambient House of Substance's "Reish Series" on Chain Reaction. The abstract frequencies on "Red" slowly built with a clinical detachment that withholds as much information as possible. In spite of such a skeletal structure hints of a sparse Tech House groove are fleshed out on "Kind" and "From." An asymmetrical rhythm is set up on "Hos" which sounds like someone walking with a limp. But the distribution of the beats is hypnotic and layers of static percussion give it just enough bite while a loose connection on "SAR" renders the signal unstable and the shimmering strings and bass are consumed by interference.

The moodiness generated by Sinking's Lenses Massel, aka Fumble and Kandel occupy the opposite end of the frequency spectrum. Although glitches and static crackle away like a Morse code signal deep beats rumble and muffled drums dominate the album's mood. "Wind Up" is a fantastic piece of dark Ambient Techno. Massel builds a scratchy surface out of glitches and a westward while the dubbed out bass echoes in the background. The whole thing is carried by a syncretized funk with threateningly low end bass and strings. In the middle of this is a luscious haze. Likewise with the opening track on "Pelt-Melt" which is gradually assimilated into the track's mass of pulses and clicks. Elsewhere, there are hints of a hard-edged abstraction, although they tend to be hidden amongst brooding atmospheres. What distinguishes this accomplished album is the way each sound is spatialised so that it is distinct and remote from all the others, while contributing to the dark atmospheres that have become Senking's signature.

SEN BORTHWICK

## Chas Smith

Nakko Wolvenreud

COLD BLUE LAB/ULU

Chas Smith is a Los Angeles based composer whose exotic instruments you're likely to have come across probably without realising it. He's performed them on film scores such as *The Shawshank Redemption* and *American Beauty*. Henry Parich is an obvious model. Both are West Coast composers and creators of their own respective instrumentariums, which avoid dual-tempered tunings and whole components are beautiful aesthetic objects in their own right.

But Smith's music has a totally different character. The distinctive timbres of Parich's music are sweet, light, misty. By Smith's music are loud, heavy and resonant. Honest listeners might admit a little disappointment with Parich's music, given the travails of his ideas and the beauty of his instruments, the compositions which he has created for them are often four-square in their rhythms and organisation, and tricky in their textures. With Smith's music, the sounds are as compelling as his concepts and instruments.

The low and emphatic contrasts with Parich, and the highly resonant qualities of Smith's pieces obviously owe a lot to a certain kind of minimalism. La Monte Young rather than the systems music of Bech and Gies. Though his sounds are slowly unfolding, the pieces have are still short-winded by Young's standard with nothing longer than 14 minutes.

Smith plays most of the instruments, having with some assistance from George Budd. Nakko Wolvenreud is scored for such wonders as Bells Tweener, Copper Bell and Thunderbells and involves some almost voca textures, though the complex harmonics often make the result sound more like electronic than acoustic music. The softer textures in the first half of *Genus* Shio-Bur might evoke New Age if the piece hadn't been preceded by the much harder sounds of *Tors*. Tors' fluctuations presumably named after the voice, security forces of Hsian doctor. Papa Doc Daxler. *Genus* is for "highly processed pedal steel guitar" — and its CDW residue becomes clearer after you've heard *Nero*. The *Dixie* for the unprocessed guitar. Nakko Wolvenreud is a superb addition to the Cold Blue catalogue.

ANDY HAMILTON

## Wadada Leo Smith

ReReflectivity

COLLABORATION

## Wadada Leo Smith

Golden Quarter

FRANK 7054-CD

*ReReflectivity* is a remake of an album Leo Smith released on his own label in 1975. For many cubist established pandemics such revision would be a recipe for disaster. Not so here. Brought up on the blues, from the start

Smith refused to be patronised by being relegated to a style. He embraced a wide open musical aesthetic, allowing his trumpet solos maximum freedom to engage in interplay with his colleagues. Ambitious goals — global musically, transcultural, dialectic performance immediacy meant a lifetime in academia (New Haven, Woodstock, Calicut). That's what the pliancy that is the test of an improviser's willingness to stake everything on the note being played here and now.

Recorded with Anthony Davis, Isaac and Michael Favara (then in a NYC studio in January 2000) this *ReReflectivity* is so chill, pure and pared down it will probably only reach listeners who can tolerate free improvisation or the works of Morton Feldman. This is a pity because at its core is a spring, dancing, groovacious trumpet voice. Smith doesn't know how much sum up the history of his instrument, as provide an independent understanding of field, hollow and hollow break as critical modern art. Harmonic surprise and acute use of silence leaves no listener secure. *ReReflectivity* does everything you think you know about blues and jazz, then hangs the motifs out on a line. The brightness and definition dazzle.

Just to show *ReReflectivity* isn't all out there can do. Golden Quarter asks drummer Jack DeJohnette to the fore. The group becomes something else entirely, a fleet, state of the art jazz quartet. The current scene is suffering from a surfeit of burning, Ayler-fused saxophonists. It is the antidote, being heartily fine in the best department, but also speculative and crisscrossed with ideas. DeJohnette has been involved with much fusion stage, but here he is utterly at home and sounding vibrant. Golden Quarter isn't as sublime as *ReReflectivity*, but the balance between groove thrust and internal dialogue is brilliant. Smith's slyly trumpet cuts through with unrelenting power and finesse, and everyone sounds alert. These musicians are still surprising each other, the deal is real.

HEK WATSON

## David Thomas & Two Pale Boys

Surf & Up

WILDERNESS 00001

In declaring why *The Waxmen Birds* metamorphosed into a remembrance of the Cleveland central noise crowd, Peter Ulloa David Thomas employed the Dick Prince. The group, he said, had moved so far from their origins as a semi-acoustic Brechtian outfit that everyone said they sounded like Ulloa. "If it walks like a duck and barks like a duck and quacks like a duck, it's a duck," he concluded.

This second studio album by Thomas's new ensemble... in many ways the most compelling of many fine albums to have borne his name since the adrenaline-pumping physical catharsis of 1978's *The Modern Dance* asks the age old question: when is a



duck not a duck?

Although it's difficult to imagine Ubu having employed a bang, the sheer attack of opening track "Runaway" creates the same rattling resonance with the human skeleton as the corrosive "Non Alignment Pact" managed all those years ago. It clearly isn't just me who is experiencing a late 70s flashback here: the opening line contains a direct quote from Pat Smith's "Kinberly." In the circumstances it's difficult to believe that the screaming synthesizer at the end is not a direct reference back to the high pitched scream that represented the brain of Ubu's body electric.

But there is much more going on here than a reminder of past glories. "Man In The Dark" combines Thomas's characteristic acerbic interplay with a genuinely heart-breaking melody in a manner that recalls and then surpasses *Sweetest/Thorniest* period Tom Waits. Thomas waxes is more garish, more disturbing than Waits' perfectly crafted sepia portraits, and it is just as moving.

I've never been able to look at Thomas without thinking of the bewitched raven in David Lynch's *Eraserhead*. Indeed, he shares with the film director the ability to parody a genre while simultaneously unlocking its forgotten power. This is precisely the effect he achieves with the self-conscious horrors of "Night Drawing" and "Ghosts" in which his superbly evocative language flickers past like road signs. The version of *The Beach Boys' "Surf's Up"* fulfils the promise contained in Wood's own voice and piano version from the discarded *Smile* album, revealing just how emotive Thomas's voice can be, over a spare soundscape created by Pete Boy guitarist Keith Molise and trumpeter Andre Dagmar, who provide superb backdrops of light and shadow throughout. When is a duck not a duck? When it's amazing.

OW GATSWIN

## Keith Tippett

*Later/Secrets*  
FMR 70000 CD

Last year's release of Keith Tippett's *Sentinel Energy*, an impressively successful channeling of the huge improvising post called Centeebe, has laid testimony on past achievements, so it's a luxury to be reminded that, three decades on, Tippett continues to pursue his creatively ambitious vision. "Knuckes" (the title is an anagram of his children Lisa and Luke) incorporates a section requiring the performer to improvise, but it's a profoundly motivated work for piano and string quartet. Violinists David Le Page and Christopher George, cellist Philip Sheppard and Makina Alou on viola join Tippett for this compelling recording. The fluidity and dexterity of the music is immediately striking. The opening theme is stated boldly, before dissolving into more elaborate development, then returning at the end of 37 minutes to complete the arc.

As a solo performer Tippett has displayed a

sophisticated capacity to shape extended forms from gradations of mood, variations of intensity and modulation of colour. There is an improviser's shrewd awareness of what can be done informing the piece's transitions and juxtapositions. Ideological allusions – blues inflection, a Sade-like waltz – are accommodated without disrupting the flow.

Tippett's readiness to adapt his instrument to expressive requirements, plucking and rubbing the strings, and otherwise modifying the piano's sound is evident in his playing here, but it's surely also feeds into his writing for strings. This really is a fully integrated quartet rather than piano plus quartet, five players conceived as a single organism. Composed music it may be, but it's fundamentally continuous with Tippett's years of spontaneous interaction with diverse highly accomplished yet idiosyncratic musicians.

The CD also contains "Let The Music Speak", a piece recorded for the BBC, with Tippett's delicate piano soundings played against a choir's voice. It reveals a preciousness here between honesty and sentimentality, individual listeners will decide which side it falls. "Knuckes", on the other hand, is unequivocally another landmark work from the musician.

JULIAN COWLEY

## Tortoise Standards

WARP/WARP CD

In the absence of "Two For Two" and "Stormy Weather" we must assume that Tortoise, as they have been throughout a career that kick-started the increasingly nebulous world of post-rock and inspired a thousand garage groups to potch up their thousand grunts, are more interested in setting standards than they are in playing them.

But you don't need me to tell you that standards are a touch problematic these days. Tortoise's art, like that of so many musicians in the postmodern scene, age whose existence they hoped to confirm, is essentially sonic. Music increasingly lies in the pose and skill of the blend rather than in the breathtaking innovation of the ingredients. Setting a standard – being the latest, the laziest, the most radical, etc. – feels more and more like a redundant, neurological reflex best left to the bone through the nose: retro primitives. The alternative: use Progressive approach involves holding track influences in more or less lively suspension. The quest for garaged achievement is abandoned, replaced by something which is more subtle and, by definition, more subjective. So how can Tortoise be setting standards when their essentially polite, ultra-refined approach to ensemble playing is drowled out by the cartoon excess all around them?

The answer, of course, is ratty. Tortoise's command of their sonic materials is as deft and knowing as was Steely Dan's at their prime, and the similarity doesn't end there. Naming the opening track after a Stoic

# the compiler

New compilations: reviewed, rated, reviled

Old wind from the north. Run by Anton Nikkila and Ales Borsos, NAB Research Digest is a CD-R label from Finland dedicated to preserving sonic experiences from the industrial tundra. **Geologists And Professionals Tourists** (NABRD01 CD-R) is a collection of experimental electronics from Helsinki, Moscow and Brussels, and features the "transcendental Gobber" of the complex, Supersensit, aerial geometry from Benzo and Isomirka, and Robert Ryan gestures from "Herkimerherker". **Plucktastic**

**Samples From Helsinki Underground 1981-1987** (NABRD02 CD-R) is an intermittently stunning document of rustling darkness from the age of cassette culture. The stars of the show are probably Sweslar, who conjure an air of grim, metallic desolation from treble-less guitars, metronomic drum machines and grinding gear sparks. Film maker and member of Sweslar Mika Taanila and HS Tuomien translate the slack key guitar from Hawaii's tropical paradise to Karelia's high lonesome plain on "Five Easy Pieces For Do-a-loop", while Taanila and Tuomien prove that the gang isn't all future librarians by submerging the ghost of HipHop under layers of guitar drone.

Reviewed and compiled by Gerald Short and Pascal Arment. **Le Jazzbeat** (Luzermin JMAN002/003 CD) is a two part release documenting the output of France's music libraries from the late 60s and early 70s. Volume One is dedicated to Musique Pour L'image, set up by Roger Viger to supply films, TV and radio with quality background themes, while giving his mates a chance to experiment with some top flight session musicians. These included Romanian composer Vladimir Cosma, represented here by the psychedelic boogaroo workout "Ultra PopPop", and dapper Camerounian funkster Junior Dikanga, responsible for the last "Millennium's" Claude Vast also works up a shimmering swell on the magnificent "Dugbog". Harder and colder, Volume Two is dedicated to Eddie Warner's L'illustration Musicale label, and features Warner's own "Devil's Area" and "Sleez Up", which come across like music from a lost black movie, while the Roger Ploms tracks "Knock It" and "Hard Labour" have a disablation warden all over 'em.

He may not be in a library but Pole whistles his secrets under the watchful eye of a stern schoolmaster on Penetrator. Surprised the featured on **Versus Another Interesting** (Quatermass Q5104 CD)

Yielding often stunning results (Pole, Plaid vs Drupnoidus Devisia and Plintaria vs Schmittzofel), this collaboration between the Quatermass and Rafter interlocking libris is far more than the usual cross-platform marketing play. Quatermass lists its listeners in on a few more secrets with **Substancia 3** (Q5115 CD), containing new and previously unreleased material from the laboratories of their mutant sound techniques. Particularly compelling moments of field electronic ambient include Berge's restless "Random Motion", the enigmatic bursts of percussive and sustained pulses of Freedom's "Cantho" and Shudo slumming his HipHop beats into each other.

The arses collected on **Brazil Police Phenice** (Bokovin Blevin Q05 CD) won't stay silent for anyone's sake. This crucial collection is New York's deepest underground beat community's response to the police brutality that has blighted the city in recent years. Compiled by Crennon Thornton, who up to now had seemingly been fighting a one man battle to make electronic music engage with the real world, *Brazil Police Phenice* breaks with excitement, passion, bile, rage, forward motion and energy – pretty much everything missing from recent electronic music. There's lots of glitchy drum 'n' bass longtraps and subtronic raggas, but the best track is Huge Woodoo's sinister, cinematic collaboration with Mike Ladd, "NYPD Blues".

Other corners worthy of attention: **Rapaci Transit** (Chosine Industries CHT01 CD) – twisted HipHop and glitch-hop from Rush Burt Objects, Rocks, Palauka, East Faubourg Project, Rec. Center and Prehe-73. **Schuffe/Feder Kompakt B** (CD) – Teutonic electronica both glum and fun. **Yautica** (Innovative INTD13 2XCD) – environmental recordings and particle physics from Taylor Daupine, Jerome Hoedgen, Pimmon, Pimmon, Tenny, Viora Clark and Richard Churrier. **Revolve Vol 3** (Wet 4 59003 CD) – happy drive, global spin round-up featuring AC Mothers Temple, Magic, Carpathians, Ohm and Smiling. **The Century Ave. Alaska** (Kity-Yo KYO1039 2xCD) – German soundtrack featuring Caudex, Peaches, Luch and the Dave Pile-sampling **Marmaboli Nightlight** (WPF: WPFRECD001 CD) – DJ Highlight's round-up of Minneapolisian electronic. **Sonic Circuits VIII** (Innova INNOVA117 CD) – electroacoustic music from Frances (Thomson), Katherine Gordon and John Van Seggelen. 1. Reviewed by Ken Holings and Peter Szepes

Not all there: Reynolds



## Reynolds

Blank Tapes

TRIESTE OMBREUX 100000 CD

## Reynolds

Blank Tapes

BETLEY WELCOMES CAREFUL DRIVERS/BLACK DEW & PLACENTA  
NO NUMBER CD

Miguel Tomasiñ, the self-negating guru for the Argentinian trio Reynolds, claims that the group began back in 1967 when he was three years old and well before the other two members had even been born. Reynolds accounts for such a historical improbability by claiming that they harness the power of a parallel universe called Miniceto where the normal flows of time and space do not apply. Such rifts in logic are common within Reynolds' metaphysical riddles and result from the group's unique working process. Although, or rather because, Tomasiñ suffers from Down's Syndrome, he offers an incredible wealth of fanciful neologisms and indeterminate aesthetic proclamations to the rest of the group. Alan Courts

and Roberto Conlazo have a remarkable sensitivity in helping Tomasiñ actualize his unusual concepts, whether that be the 10,000 Chicken Symphony or one of their inexplicably affirmative drone-rock excursions.

Blank Tapes was pieced together from digital and analogue treatments of, you guessed it, blank tapes. Released by Bernhard Günter on his trente ombreux label, this album begins almost inaudibly before revealing the Kirlian glow of tape hiss. Reynolds approach their source material not as an empty void but as a medium with an intrinsic aural quality as vital as any guitar or drum kit. They successfully manifest and amplify the black energy of the tape hiss to mimic the somatic fluctuations of blood passing through arteries and deep inhalations of oxygen into lungs. Blank Tapes is much more than a conceptual fuck-you, as the group attains the same simplicity that is common in the strongest Fluxus work in both conceptual and aesthetic execution.

The Reynoldsian universe spins backwards in time on "————", a blast of atavistic noise rock reminiscent of the earliest work of Swans or Skullflower. Yet Reynolds' desire to invoke the turmoil of rock is not

born out of angst, abjection or control; rather it aims to manifest rock's ecstatic ability to channel a primal and immediate connection between body and sound. Here, Courts and Conlazo don the robes of lo-fi Thurston Moore and Lee Ranaldo by intertwining simple melodies with slashing guitar noise and tricky production techniques. Tomasiñ, who also handles the percussive duties, utters a whimsical, incessant string of atonal hislatables and non-linear banter. Altogether it's a strangely magical experience.

While these two records operate as the furthest points on Reynolds' aesthetic spectrum, there is a dignified, if meandering thread common to all of their work that is easier felt than heard. You don't listen to Reynolds with only your ears; you also use your toes, your eyelashes and, perhaps most importantly, your soul. Reynolds claim their music to be the by-product of a psychic communion with every object they encounter — humans, pumpkins, rocks or discarded tape. As outlandish as it may seem, each Reynolds album leaves the uncanny feeling that what they claim may in fact be true.

JIM HAYNES

philosopher is exactly the kind of so time it's neat, trick that Becker and Fagen delighted in pulling off: "Seneca" is the piece in question and its opening is an evocative in-deep-of hair's breadth precision.

In knowing contrast to the studio-based explorations that made up much of Tortoise's last album TNT, this one kicks off with those classic markers of rock authenticity: mans hum and the expectant buzz of live amps cranked loud. The group launches into an extended 'Vegas farlane' all shuddering percussion and jangling, long-held guitar chord. But Tortoise's souped-up excursion into sincerity lasts barely two minutes. That 'Vegas farlane' is a prelude soon replaced by a

trademark Chicago groove, all skipping polyrhythms and slyly dubwise sub-bass furnished with neat touches of exotica/retro chrome by John McEntire's parsimony approach to studio effects. One of the many attributes that has made Tortoise music intriguing is their ability to hold mind and body in unceasing close accord, providing hypnotic headnodding rhythms alongside cerebral textures and expert tonal manoeuvres. Standards flirts with rock and funk, feedback growls, and shimmers. Syncopated handclaps hint at sweat. On The Corner-era Miles, locking the group in a relentless flow of almost, but not quite, bubble music. On track after track, they deliver hot grooves held in

suspension, doused in a clearing aura of authority.

Which means that Standards is as close to a garage record as Tortoise are ever going to make. The pared fragments "Eden 2" and "Eden 1" saw their formula down to its component parts of rock solid and casually intricate bass drum backbeats crowned up by freeform and plaintively melodic guitar lines. Elsewhere the twin alchemy of studio manipulation and musicianship is given more time to work. Yet throughout, Tortoise's smooth assimilation of influence leads to knowing nods in any number of directions.

For example "Bernway" opens with a passage whose Radeophone shimmer is not so

much otherworldly as Another Green World's. Its gracious, cerebral movement, coaxed from ukulele from those ageing trebles. Similarly "Hemca" is a lightfingered approximation of '70s funk signals, waited in squishy reverbs whose smooth progress is eventually disturbed by a staccato urgency that subtly dismantlers and reassembles to basic pulse. "Blackjack" has more than a hint of John Barry about it, but again, the smears of treated guitar and the open-handed harpsichord chords successfully overt that schmaltzy upward modulation to a new and subtler destination. Tortoise have always been adept at conjuring innocence from experience and the melodies throughout Standards share

fresh and undomestic from their artful settings. If you value sunniness, richness, immaculate timing and the occasional tilted eyebrow then there's a lot to enjoy on Torbjørn's most assured set to date.

CHRIS SHARP

## Various Artists

Mototrüb #1  
KITCHEN MOTORS SPHRM CD

## Various Artists

Mototrüb #2  
KITCHEN MOTORS SPHRM CD

Kitchen Motors, a music and art promotion group in Reykjavik, Iceland, commissions in much the same matchmaking manner as Derek Bailey does for Company, their programme collaborations and hope the collaborators will like the idea. Reykjavik was chosen City of Culture last year, which gave them the funding to organize a year-long series of monthly concerts. These two sets document the highlights. Each is well presented in a translucent wallet with a poster-sized insert describing the works. Graphics include television aerials, carvings and sprinkled culinary apparatus. The homely images reinforces the suggestion in Kitchen Motors' literature that what they do is like cooking.

Packaged in traffic light colours, Mototrüb #2 comes in a green wallet and Mototrüb #1 in red. Remaining true to the Green Cross Code, #2 has a lot more forward motion while #1 begins with the most static piece of all, a 30 minute extract from a performance by artist Magnus Pásson and vocal Icelandic trio Skúlagættir. Pásson and Ragnheiður Guðnadóttir engage in a conversation periodically drowned by loud electronics. The track is surprised by Hilmar Jónsson and Ulfr Haraldsson's "Vellunur", a piece performed by Kitchen Motors' Jóhann Jóhannsson and the ten-piece CAPUT Ensemble. It again plays blocks of sound, constructed from long held notes separated by microtonal differences, onto an electronic background. "Junkyard Alchemy" is a series of improvisation on instruments built from scrap by Björk Jónsson. The murky results make it difficult to tell the polydrome from the gamelan, yet it rumbles along effectively.

The second CDs include with TF318A, a quartet of shortwave radio enthusiasts jamming on something pitched between Terry Riley's "Smoke On The Water" and Stereolab's Apples' wives of state, and distant voices raise memories of tuning to European stations for strange music. Electronic quartet Puma and Ikonite. Spin add a string quartet, an opera singer and an actress for "Amorismundo about a threepersonal housewife living in a Reykjavik suburb". Though the Icelandic text is obviously key, the music blends styles well once Puma get up to speed, integrating with the powerful

strings and Asa Jónsdóttir's thrilling singing. Big Band Brutal, a quartet including Kitchen Motors' Kristín Björg Kringsjörð, closes the set with improvised soundtracks for Hugukenur Dagsson's "galactic cartoons featuring Kalk the bunny and friendly shark".

ANDY CHAPPEL

## Warhorse

As Heavens Turn To Ash  
SOUTHERN LEAD SOUND CD

## Cathedral

Enfymne  
ERACHE MOSE 35 CD

More tales of "Mighty King Ours" accompanied by crushing, soul destroying riffs out of the songbook of Mighty King Ours. With last year's two masterpieces of black-heeled brutality — Electric Wizard's Dæphorone and Hell On Wheels: The Art Of Self-Defense — doom Metal could very well be this year's cause célèbre in underground rock circles. With the supra-heavy Asa Heavens Turn To Ash, Worcester's Massachusetts's Warhorse have fired the opening salvo of the new millennium in doom's holy war against the late Metal infidels.

Where other subculture groups worship at the temple of the sweet lead and Black Sabbath's "Sweet Leaf", Warhorse consort with the "bloody and concubine" Mike Hubble the soundworld of Todd LaRocca: Mike Hubble and Jerry Omeo certainly owns more than a small debt to Master Of Reality-era Sabbath, the guitar feedbacks are noticeably more "orgasm" from those of other peers, and the track layers of feedback scum are slightly less ghoulish. Particularly noteworthy is Omeo's awesome, oscillating bass sound, probably created with all manner of vintage Orange amplification. Of course, that's not to say that this power into doesn't try to bludgeon you into "towering and beholding the dieth of hell", just that their ferocious power is sharper and less blunt than other prophets of the pipe of the wicked.

Along with America's tortured Christian death cult Trouble, ex-Napalm Death main man Lee Dorman's Cathedral were the harbingers of doom Metal. Way back in Semtex 1990, in the face of receding excerpts from cinder barbedores over Mick Hemers' ghoulish. Dorman returned to the old old music and quasi-mystical virtues of Birmingham's favourite sons, Black Sabbath and Wolfchild: General, and cooked them in a stratospheric of lead and muck. Cathedral's sixth album, Enfymne, was made with one of the scene's great pros, producer Billy Anderson, but unlike his previous efforts with Orange Goblin and Sleep, he hasn't sacrificed some of the dirt in order to make it acceptable. Of course, Cathedral's main problem remains unaltered. Dorman's clearer vocal style makes you understand why he invented the garbled great groan with Napalm Death.

PETER SHAPPO

# the boomerang

Recent reissues: rated on the rebound

More than 25 years since it shut up shop, the reputation of Bernard Slatkin's ESP-Disk label as a hothouse which helped incubate New York's mid-60s free jazz and underground rock scenes continues to gather momentum via two European reissue schedules, courtesy of the Dutch Calibre label and the Italian Abraxas organisation.

Even after all these years, it's easy to understand the abiding appeal of the ESP operation. Stored within the albums' urgent, semiautomatic, monochromatic artwork are some of the original documents from one of the great local outbursts of outsider art. Listening to almost any ESP release, head full of the myths and legends that have attached themselves, you immerse in both the label and the strange, shadowy musical communities it reported on: you sink into a reverie, overtaken by a returned version of the classic late 18th century notion of the visionary artist, asked to the very fringes of society, laboured in penury and neglect to formulate new means of communication during times of great social and cultural upheaval, unmediated, portmanteau, burning with the promise of revolution to come. Dive headlong into the label's full catalogue, and you get a sense of an entire city's creative underbelly launching itself out on white. Peter Smith would later celebrate as an endless sea of desolations.

The reality was something like that, perhaps, and in our own civil, level-headed times, the doomed Romantic fantasy can only be enhanced by the knowledge that many of the musicians associated with ESP either died young, went crazy or disappeared without trace.

As it turns out, all of the ESP releases recently issued by Calibre have long been available on CD. But if you don't already own them, then now is the time to teleport into the alternative universe described by

**Sun Ra:** The Heliocentric Worlds Of Sun Ra: Vols 1 & 2 (ESP 10114 and 10117). **Ornette Coleman's** par-crossed Throbbing String project (premiered on Town Hall 1962) (ESP 10061). **Albert Ayler's** Spontaneous Music (ESP 10020), in which a disintegrated marching band, paralysed by snake handlers and holy rollers, and consumed by Ramonesque fire, is caught in the process of creating a new sanctified music for the atomic age.

**The Bob James Trio's** Epiphonies (ESP 10091), a genuine one-off which combines icy piano jazz abstractions with crusty, lo-fi tape wares and electronics from The Sonic Arts Union's Gordon Mumma and Robert Ashley. Of course, James would survive to

have a second life soundtracking TV sitcoms and recording feather-like fusion for Creed Taylor. Satchidanand: **Gioseppe Logan** and **Lowell Davidson** (more or less vanished after recording their self-titled ESP releases (ESP 10007 and ESP 10112 respectively), a fact which locates these two slabs of mysterious black noise right at the heart of ESP's outsider mythology.

All the above is issued by Calibre in the standard jewel case format. Abraxas, on the other hand, has already released selected items from the ESP catalogue as 180 gramme vinyl editions (see Boomerang, The Wire 2005), and is now issuing CD versions packaged in heavy duty cardboard sleeves which are near-perfect facsimiles of the original artwork. So if you want to upgrade your vinyl and/or jewel case copies of **Albert Ayler's** Solo: Sony 1st 1965 (ESP GET10118) and **New York Eye And Ear Control** (ESP GET10131) or **Sun Ra's** Concert For The Comet Khazadik (ESP GET10117), here's your chance.

In the same format, Abraxas has reissued (for the first time in this instance) what might well be the defining ESP release, an electric version of **The East Village Other** (ESP GET10121), the underground newspaper that flourished briefly in the mid-60s as an alternative information source for the city's Eastside heads.

Published on "Wednesday Day", 6 August 1966, the album is a mere 23 minute tape collage. As a recording of a society report on the wedding of Lyndon Johnson's daughter spoons away in the background sounding in this context like a transmission from another galaxy, a number of New York's finest art scene bores, radicals, agitators and draft dodgers risk up to show the straighties on Capitol Hill where the real action is at. Steve Weiler and Tony Kupperberg waddle over generic coffee house protest folk. The Velvet Underground improve a short burst of "noise", a trio of saxophones Marion Brown, banished Scott Holt and drummer Ronald Shannon Jackson sound the clemor-call of the new jazz. Gerard Malanga and Ingrid Superstar indulge in some bitchy Factory-zone gossip. Allen Ginsberg and Peter Orlovsky pour mantras over a harmonium drone, and Ishmael Reed recites an angry poem. As a listening experience, it has limited appeal maybe. But as a snapshot of a nation caught between the social and cultural clompings of the post-war years and the flux and mutability of New York City in the mid-60s, it's priceless. C Reviewed by Tony Hemmings



# in brief dub

Reviewed by Steve Barker

**Roland Alphonso** Something Special (Heartbeat HEART10 CD)  
Studio One's boss, Clement Dodd writes a short tribute to the late Roland Alphonso as a preface to the sets' comprehensive notes. He recognizes the saxophonist as "a foundation musician" meaning without him the music would not have been the same. The 2D track collection covers the period from 1958-68, a time when Alphonso and his friends in The Skatalites, created a sound that still reverberates around the world today. Essential.

**Ciudadnegra** Dubbe Echo Beach (BORN CD)  
The Brazilian reggae outfit recruited a stellar line-up for remix duties. Sly & Robba, Scratch, Mad Professor, Alton and the late Augustus Pablo. However, the relatively slim nature of the original material does not fare well across the choppy waters of the *Alton*. For committed internationalists only.

**Goldmaster** Allstars Influence Of The Masters Dub (Master Of Dub CD)  
Proving there is always room for a well crafted and loving interpretation of a music genre that is supposedly dead and gone Goldmaster Allstars have spent a decade developing this cool tribute of a sound. Basically a 12 track instrumental album with a couple of dubwise variations thrown in. This is a stylistic tribute to the musicians and mixers who have set Jamaican music apart from other genres. In a smattering of reggae knowledge helps locate the sources for "Come Ruddy", "Chances One Stepper", "Far East" and the rest. A class act.

**King Tubby** King Tubby's Lost Tapes (Various Artists/Heartbeat HEART10 CD)  
Various Artists/King Tubby/Aggrovators Cheation Rebel & Dub (CD)  
A must-don't die by any means my being as I approached *Lost Treasures* on first sight yet another set of reissued dubs from the bottom of a long-forged shelf. Even Tubby was at times unable to speak a lead-in rhythm. But here the true value as the tracks are sourced from what sounds like master tapes used to cut dubplates for Tubby's Home Town Hi-Fi Sound System. Most of the tunes run to four minutes plus giving more bounce to the ounce for the dance. The Comet Campbell dubbed vocal sides stand resplendent here, especially the version of "I Shall Be Released". *Gold Heartbeat* CD is a fresh cut to the Jackie Mittoo classic "In Cold Blood" and therefore the sets are quite groovy

and the keyboard king himself guests on Sly Dunbar's urgent "Jumpin' Dub", a rhythm which could stand revival in these speedier times. Unmissable for disciples of the dubmaster.  
The second Tubby release is an excellent value compilation of 15 Slicker Lee produced vocals with a second CD of the corresponding dub versions. There are strong songs from sublimists Andy, Clark Campbell, Thompson, The Paragons, etc and the album opens with the emotional "Rasta Don't Fear" from Derrick Morgan — a must for any Tubby collection.

**Mad Professor** Tru In The Mix (Heartbeat HEART10 CD)  
It is always a mistake to write off or ignore the work of Neil Fraser, aka Mad Professor because he will always return to distill a double dose to mind and body. There must be new capital investment down at the Anwa studios. Because on this new set the sound is brought to amazing levels of pleasing separation in the mix. The messages of black consciousness still remain as constant themes and unusually, a couple of strong vocal tunes are included in the set. Scratch bapographer Dave Katz provides informative and entertaining sleeve notes. Obviously sourced by the recent tribute compilations on Popones and Universal Egg, this is the Prof's best for some time.

**Lee Perry & The Upsetters** Revolution Dub (Various Artists/Heartbeat HEART10 CD)  
Lee Perry/Jungle Lion Music (CD)  
Revolution Dub is most certainly the most spooky of Lee Perry's albums. An early experiment in the Black Ark before the arrival of the full-blown EFX stack later in the decade, the rhythms are deceptively slow and deliberate, with as much space as Scratch ever created. Layered within the mix are disembodied voices, captured grunts and moans as in "Woman's Dub", while on "Doctor On The Go" — up pops a bunch of samples from the British sitcom *Doctor In The House*, played through a semi-mimic channel. Why does all this nonsense remain so compelling?

Jungle On is another top value budget compilation which traces a 20 year path from The Untouchables "Tigrem Up" from 1968 to Watty Burnett's Black Ark classic "Open The Gate". The 18 tracks also pick up Carlton & The Slicers' elemental "Better Days", a favourite of the late Roger Eagle, who did more than anyone to popularise the music of Scratch in the UK through the BJs.

New fans of The Upsetter start here — then get lost amongst the rest.

**Ernest Ranglin** Modern Answers To Old Problems (Tusk TUSK02 CD)  
The release of this album late last year will have bypassed most reggae fans as it received very little coverage at all. This is not strictly dub, but it is created by a master of both reggae and jazz, joined by Fela Kuti's drummer Tony Allen. Queen of UK lovers rock Sylvia Tella, sax boss Courtney Pine and Dennis Baptiste, and a complete Seregelese rhythm section. This is the album Ranglin wanted to make — no further recommendation required.

**Jack Ruby** Presents The Black Foundation (Heartbeat HEART10 CD)  
**King Tubby/Errol Thompson** The Black Foundation In Dub (Heartbeat HEART10 CD)  
Just as it seems the quality end of the reggae revival market is to be dominated by UK imports Blood & Fire and Pressure Sounds, Chris Wilson's Heartbeat label sponsors those upstairs with many stripes by the issue of these two stone classics. The late Jack Ruby is perhaps best known for his production some would say financing of Burning Spear's *Marcus Garvey* album and its immediate follow-ups, all of which rode the crest of reggae's late 70s golden wave. Ruby's domestic Jamaican outlets were the For and Well imprints which hosted some of the toughest rhythms and most militant vocal outpourings of the era, few of which found homes outside Kingston with the notable exception of the Clappers set-up in Brooklyn. Here we have a peerless compilation which captures Ruby's output at its most vital. Featuring an unreleased extended version of Big Youth's concurring tracks to Spear's "Marcus Garvey" plus vocal contributions from Winston Rodney himself. The Heptones, Junior Hinds (all those underappreciated and underused of all of the great Jamaican artists). The Gaylads and The Eagles. But the prize within is an unreleased clutch of instrumental from Ruby's house band, The Black Disciples, amongst which is an eight minute take on the Studio One rhythm "Rockin' Rock", here reinterpreted. Free Rhodessa? Ruby introduces the group one by one, starting with ska bossan Hornmouth and concluding with a stellar horn line-up which bursts triumphantly into the brass chorus. Needless to say the dub companion CD, although not matching the vocal set track for track, is indispensable.

**Suns Of Arqa** Muslimtunes (Various Artists/Heartbeat HEART10 CD)  
Dr Swinton versus Ashton-Under-Lyne: the clash of the boys connected by the 1950 orbital, one obsessed by the tragedy of

Rastane and the other absorbed and attracted by the drones of the Indian subcontinent. The story goes that Arqa's Michael Waddie met Blyn Jones only one time. Jones had been bitten by The Suns Of Arqa since their late 70s collaboration with a punk Sherwood on the now classic, early effing-best-road trip that was *Revolver Of The Pharaohs*. Waddie sent Jones the tapes and right the wrongs back within the week. Here they are edited down to answer the ever repeating "Muslimtunes" canon, and it's a perfect place to start for both artists. 18 crisp tracks on a single album is an achievement to which neither has laid claim in the past.

**Various Artists** Future World (Various Artists/Heartbeat HEART10 CD)  
The album's title plays it all in that marketing style for, of course, there's little to no funk in there at all. However, there is a dizzying array of beats and rhythms to guide a dancing foot. The reason for its inclusion in this column is the inclusion of two promising 21st century dub tracks. Firstly from Germany's Stereodeline organisation come the duochord (sic) named Beccao Bajou and then from Japan the even more embarrassingly saddled Rhinobud. Both tracks possess enough ideas and energy for the most po-faced dub fan to concentrate on the music.

**Vibronics** Dub (Various Artists/Various Labels)  
Sound System favours The Vibronics provide what is probably today's heaviest UK dub sound around — on record at least. After producing exclusive dubplates for many of the acts on the current sound system circuit, including Jah Shaka, Lindisfarne's Steve Virellus was signed up by the Zion Train boys to deliver this tough debut set which will not dissuade all of the compulsive headbangers out there. I prefer this heavyweight material cut on 12" vinyl and worked out live by Mr Selector and his DJ.

**The Walkers** Heritage Of Dub (Heartbeat HEART10 CD)  
Some two years after the untimely death of her husband Bob, reggae's darling light Rita Marley took the dubious decision to front The Walkers with ex-Uhuru's vocalist Jimmy Riley. Great vocalists though Riley undoubtedly is, this was mission impossible to surpass now to see this unparalleled set of seemingly fresh 1992 rhythms being issued via this French outlet. Apparently based on Marley/Walkers tunes (as many do) ears are unable to identify the musicians turn out to have a very contemporary feel dignified by the more steele tendencies of ungarbled. Worth an investment by any modern dub DJ. (Only for the superior rockers-style "Dub Smudge

# in brief electronica

Reviewed by Ken Hollings

## Blake Baxter Dreamsequence

III — The Collective (various 160 cd)

Words like "groundbreaking," "maverick," and "cutting-edge" are over-used to the point where they lose all meaning, so it's probably just as well none of them can be applied to this lackluster release from Detroit's self-professed "Prince of Techno," who now seems as intent upon writing himself out of the music's history as he once was to contribute some of its elder moments. In line with the aimless House-tinged melody of "Deep N Da Groove," Baxter's latest collection is a tepid, meandering affair. However, if your idea of a good time is listening to someone talk sweet and sassy over samples lifted from Berry White and Madonna, then this one's definitely for you.

## Philippe Cam Balance

new 1 cd

Combining new material with tracks previously only available on 12", the debut release from former Brussels-based DJ Philippe Cam is a bit... energetic display of what can be achieved through the intricate modulation of simple forms. The disciplined forward momentum of its opening track "Koin," a relentless reconfiguration of incessant keyboard stabs, leads into the more delicate counterpart of "Haze" and the syncretized chattering of "Golden's Day" and "UFO Drive," before heading off into the deep kosmotic spaces of "Koinne," a moment of closing stately ambience well worth surrendering to. Shimmering cosmic minimalism at its best.

## Chari Chari Spring To Summer

ULTIMA 2001 1 cd

Less a listening experience than a tiny artificial reinforcement encoded on disc, Japanese producer Katsu Inoue, working under a name that translates roughly as both "rattle" and "jungle," blends African, Asian and Brazilian motifs with sampled noises and effects. The overall result, as on "The Sun Song" and "Across The Universe" has a relaxed resuscitant charm to it, but has anyone noticed how, as the rich Amazonian tree line is progressively thinned out, there seems to be a growing number of CDs, minidiscs, videos and DVDs ready to take its place? Kind of gives you hope for tomorrow, don't it?

## Fanna Flash Fusion

compost 1 cd

The main problem with fusion is that it tends to occur only in a safe environment, which is possibly why the second album from Munich producers Roland Appel and Christian

Prommer takes a while to establish itself.

Step the first three sporadic excursions into fragmented vocals and leaden percussion and focus instead upon the electric boogie noise rhythms and dirty bass distortions of "Tel Aviv," which in turn sets the stage for such highlights as the rambunctious Techno hustle of "Referee," the silky dub affects pulsating through "Ten" and the four-square Deep House treatment on "Morning." Effortless cool, like cold water fusion requires a little effort.

## Leafcutter John Microcontact

FLUXUS 2002 1 cd

Without any coherent strategy or conceptual rigour to hold them together, these ten unrelated tracks from Wakefield's Leafcutter John seem to be united only by their creator's desire to let technology do all the talking. Sounds, mostly captured either by contact or conventional microphones, have been digitally processed and filtered down to a shifting granular mass, momentarily enlivened by the intrusion of a clucked mandolin, a pummeling drum machine or some fragmented vocal snippets from artist Tomoko Takahashi. Rarely is anything given a chance to justify its presence. Machines deserve better than this.

## Naruhisa Matsuoeka Hükari

Brigitte East (various 160 cd)

Demonstrating a capacity for organising disparate musical events without recourse to constant repetition, the reissued version of Naruhisa's 1999 album for the Japanese Styling label, *The Structures Of Breeds*, floats and slithers attractively from one rippling patch of abstract beats to another. There's a graceful freedom action to such compositions as "Fog Plants" and "Mono No Aramashi," with their angular blends of strong bass, shuffling snares, random swells and glassed, that suggests the rare ability to let things happen by themselves. More please.

## Metrovanna Retrofitting

UNION 2001 (Mute) 1 cd

Under a title deemed from a computing term for the use of existing software in a new piece of hardware, Glasgow's Scott Tynan mixes a wistful blend of analogue and digital effects to create the soundtrack for a world left far behind. Spangling electric keyboards, synths, looped Hi-Trip beats and shimmering guitars are brought together with particular success on "Space Snodads" and "A Person Take Role In November" to express the feelings of nostalgia produced by

teaching old tricks to new systems. Never has the future seemed so far away. Or so close.

## Miro Subtotal

VARIOUS RECORDING GROUPS 1 cd

It's only after the drum machine and sequencer have been switched off that we fully appreciate how much is owed to them. Free from their distractions, the indifferent vocals and miasmaic soundscapes by Massachusetts electro-pop duo Miro quickly become apparent. From the dreamy keyboard opening of "Phc" to the half-hearted attempts on "Truck South" to mesh together two guitars playing in entirely different keys, Subtotal is a grim reminder that one of the worst aspects of analogue music making is the desire to effect its products upon others.

## Monomorph Departure

Walt with (S&W) 120 cd

With a long career of annoying the neighbours already behind them, Italian brothers Marco and Fabrizio D'Arcangelo are back with a collection of deep loose-jointed electronic beats overlaid with meditative keyboards, robot voices and heavenly coloratura. An enigmatic mixture of warm tones and coolly alienated lines, their material is slow to give up all its secrets, but fragile compositions like "DOPPO" and the melancholic "Tempe" stand up well to close and repeated listening.

## Panacea German Engineering

VARIOUS 4039 1 cd

A testament to speed and frenetic movement, Panacea's follow-up to the futuristic evolution of last year's *Breeds* is a disengaged kvietism, skipping outbursts of live turntable action and euphoric, genuine responses from the US and Germany with stretches of dialogue and savage, high velocity bursts of chrome steel rhythm. Old favourites get re-bored and rebroadcast on *The Return Of Motion Sickness* and "Automatic Remind - Torture" but the outstanding moments are undoubtedly the frantic "Nightmare," the extended Playstation madness of "New Improved Stormbringer" and the creepy industrial death rattle of "In The Factory." Watch out for the brain damaged post-coit exchange hidden away at the end though.

## Stacey Pullen Today Is The Tomorrow

You Were Promised Yesterday's Science Fiction 1 cd

Stacey Pullen's *Yesterday's Science Fiction* is a

Part of Detroit's second generation, with

Carl Craig and Kerry Linkin Pullen evidently share their love of light, intelligent rhythmic structures and slightly paranoid project sites. Not that it matters. Loaded with fresh ideas and rigorous beats, his latest album is a

coherent reminder of just how smart, subtle and sophisticated Techno can be. The wailing melodies and swooning vaporous vocals of "Wings" suspended weightlessly between such hard-driving excursions as "Bakers," "Juke" and "Powershot" gain strength from their contrast, but sound flat and uninvolved when presented as a single. A thoughtful remix from Hi-Hat, together with Dave Angel's lush reinterpretation of "Juke" restores a little weight and coherence.

## Silo Alley

VARIOUS 1 cd

Many of the sustained build and the abrupt conclusion. Silo returns with a second extended exercise in rigorous party dynamics. Anyone fortunate enough to catch this Danish posse will live all know what to expect, although their studio sound digitally expanded and reprocessed now shows even greater depth and control. And swishes and pulsations fill out the basic trinitate of guitar, bass and drums, giving tracks like "Buck" with its fractured merriment and slashing symbols, an added menace. Their scheduled appearance at the Toronto-based All Tomorrow's Parties event in April should focus people's attention wonderfully.

## Twigg Sweet Tabasco

VARIOUS 1 cd

OK, so the title draws you to pass this offering by as yet another semi-tough prank from someone who's spent far too long alone in their bedroom. However, as your skull starts to splinter under the thundering jackhammer assault of "Rockn'runny," an uncompromisingly jagged construction of gritty muted beats and reverberating shivers of factory noise, you decide you might have been a tad hasty in your judgement. By the time "Pump The Meat A Burger King" has topped your spinal chord out, you're prepared to admit that Steven Owens, aka Twigg, might definitely be on to something. Passed off butt-ugly and undervalued great.

## Yellow Magic Orchestra Technopolis

2000-00 Remastered

VARIOUS 4039 1 cd

There's a rumour currently circulating round boardrooms in the West that Yellow Magic Orchestra are singlehandedly keeping the Tiger Economies alive through the sheer weight of their recent product. This first remix selection features guest twerking and reeking from Erykah Badu on the Boredoms splashing about prettily on the "Plenty-Goo-Round Him" of Cosmic Surfin' Denise Groove's free-spirited disco shake-up of the title track and a stately pair of twisted explorations, "Goosing (From The Past)" and "Crying For Future" courtesy of Logic Systems' Hideo Matsuoka. That should help a few factories to stay open for a while.

# in brief global

Reviewed by Richard Henderson

## D'Gary, Ratazanina, Françoise

Much as Zairean guitar playing reflects the thump drums that held sway before colonial influence, so does D'Gary's acoustic picking greatly resemble the harp-like sound of Madagascar's volina zither and its hump-shaped kin, the marovany. A guitarist of self-consciously eccentric though understated wit, D'Gary could qualify as the Leo Kottke of the Indian Ocean region. Like Kottke, he could content himself to put out album after album of the same meandering, but instead on *Mbo Gary* has opted to stretch out and involve vocalists in varying configurations. The results are uniformly successful, to the extent that when D'Gary's guitar disappears for several stretches as with some chorale pieces included here, it's only really missed in the hazy moments prior to its reappearance. This is Malagasy music, make no mistake about it, with much of it driven by lightning-two-step shaker pulses, with every melody aspiring to, and for the most part attaining, anthemic glory. The lyrics varyingly denounce corruption and lament the indifference of the singer's beloved but D'Gary's guitar rocks for all it's worth simply.

## Rahat Nusrat Fatch Ali Khan

Rahat Nusrat Fatch Ali Khan  
AMERICAN LEGAL MUSIC/NOVA CD  
Among the curious events in the waning days of the late Nusrat Fatch Ali Khan's life — Pakistan's most famous qawwal musician — perhaps the oddest was the announcement of his signing to American Records, the label run by ex-Beatle Boys producer Rick Rubin. Though the recordings which Nusrat made for American have yet to see posthumous release, the moon-mountain's nephew Rahat Nusrat Fatch Ali Khan, has been recorded by Rubin as well. A more intimate recital of Sufi poetry and music than Nusrat's fans are used to, this disc mirrors Rahat's living room recordings of Johnny Cash with fewer players and a dampened sound. While Rahat proves that Uncle Nusrat wasn't doing the heavy lifting all by himself, vocally speaking the younger prodigy's delivery is understated somewhat by Rubin's insistence on a modern rock radio equalization curve. The producer emphasises the sub-woofer thump of the tabla and creates a spectral high end while cranking out the middle frequencies where the human voice lives.

## Lord Invader

Lord Invader *Calypso In New York*  
YACHT RECORDS/ALBUQUERQUE CD  
Joe "Pavlov" exhorts the effortlessly eloquent calypsonian Lord Invader, as muted trumpet and skiccato, damped guitar notes underscore his mischievous, rapid-fire patter. These recordings, made between 1946 and 1961 by Folkways founder Moses Asch showcase all that is wet and wild in Trinidad's evergreen vocal traditions. Few rappers today could match this Caribbean gentleman in a cutting contest — his rhymes fired off like lyrical naja stars destined to embed themselves in the foreheads of the pompous and dishonest. "My intention is war," states the invader, which he wages with the consummate subtlety of an Ernst Lubitsch screenplay. A generations time before The Beatles took up residency there, Lord Invader discor ded "My Experience On The Reebotter" which shares thematic concerns with Ray Davies's "Lola." The editorial page never sounded so good.

## Mauritania

Songs Of The Grijots  
GRIJOTS/ALBUQUERQUE CD  
As with the early tape recordings of Algerian far superior Cheb Khaled or medieval planging, these performances of the great singers — cum social critics of Mauritania seem to hover in perpetual purview, with dramatically summoned harp chords hovering unresolved for minutes at a time. The curlicues of kalemé melody unfurl and disperse in the charged air like so much free meter smoke. The notes point out the outcast status of the singers, whose activities are viewed as debased and immoral; it's good to know that folks from the wrong side of the tracks are still making important music statements somewhere in the world. Like Indian music, the modes of Mauritania's music are set up so that improvised singing can occur within predetermined boundaries. The text of "Look How I Learn" invites the listener to "taste the pleasure obtained by music." As much could be said for this collection: whose recordings are greatly enriched by reverberations bounced from tiled walls, sumptuous in all of themselves.

## Mohammad Reza Shajarian & Kayhan Kalhor

Night Silence  
DEBERT RECORDS/ALBUQUERQUE CD  
A sure bond on ancient Persian classical modes, collectively known as the *rad*, composed by Kayhaneteh (spike fiddle) player Kayhan Kalhor. Though the incendiary

words of Mohammad Reza Shajarian are reason enough to buy this remarkable disc. Kalhor's vibrantly animates every corner of these pieces. The composer deploys contemporary studio technique with commendable subtlety, creating glittering drones from the kamancha's upper register and multi-tracking Shajarian's singing. The arrangements seek to include several of our venerable Persian instruments (barbat, lute, the two stringed dastar and the snare-like end-blown my flute), but the essence of these performances lies in the rapport between Shajarian and Kalhor. The latter continues to astonish even after his lustuous solo recordings (last year's *Scottramp Stars Like Dust*) and the three albums made with the Indo-Persian trio Ghazal.

## Spiridon Shashigin

Soul Of Yalentin  
SOL/ALBUQUERQUE CD  
Much as the Tatars have imbued overtone singing with an otherworldly character, so the residents of the Russian republic of Sacha-Yakutia have transformed the mechanism of the humble mouth harp into a rural synthesizer. Spiridon Shashigin takes one of the world's acutest instruments and conjures a frankly bizarre array of tone colours and ornaments from its single line, with the help of well-practiced plucking and brushing techniques. The moderate sustain of the first note alone raised suspicion that amplification was somehow involved, artificial boosting of Shashigin's volume would probably trample the extreme softness of his vibrato. Isometric shaping and varying note attacks. This mouth harp technique resides on a plane bordered by first-chair orchestral proficiency and the hallucinatory impact of a shorthand lute numbers station. Those old enough to recall their initial encounter with Captain Beefheart's *Blue Manu* albums in the late 60s may have an inkling of the impact of this Siberian khomus player's out-ordinary.

## Tonga, Tumbuka, Gwena

Northern And Central Malawi  
1950, 57  
SHARAH/ALBUQUERQUE CD  
Another tunezone other music like that heard on Ocora's classic Barunk album of the 60s, moving as though its player was looking to break a land speed record, this is power balladry at its most awe inspiring, accented with staccato-like vocal trills. The first important documenter of Africa's music, Hugh Tracey was willing to trek to far-off realms in search of musical treasure and moreover, had the patience to wait for it once he got there. Other instruments vying on octet and preserved by Tracey's microphone, include a one-stringed kango lute and the kudu horn, the latter sounding like an overblown baritone. One bongo board after player, having outlasted the extraordinary ability of whistlers to fly airplanes even at night, pulls up short and

announces, "I have played my life is finished." And, as always in his tracks, Hugh Tracey managed to locate the local variant on dreamy thump piano playing, in the case with something like the mechanical equivalent of flanging engineered into the instrument's design.

## Various Artists

Doob Doob O Rama U — More Filmmos  
From Bollywood  
VIRAMA/ALBUQUERQUE CD  
Of all the troves of World Music worthy still in the process of being discovered, the latest is also fortunately nearly forgotten. Bombay is home to the world's busiest film industry, whose every release is a musical retrospective of the plot. The playback singers, skilled and evidently tireless session vocalists whose recordings are named by the onscreen talent, are few in number but mighty in stature. All the best names in the field — Lata Mangeshkar and her sister, the winsomely voiced Asha Bhosle, Kishore Kumar, Mohammed Rafi — are present on this compilation, the second volume of Indian film songs from the German label Narmad. As colourfully packaged and every bit as much fun as its predecessor, though lacking Volume One's highlight notes, Doob Doob O Rama U encompasses surf guitar shrieking strangles, quavering vibraphones and Sousa styled marches, often within the same song. Fortunately there is little overlap with GlobeStyle's essential three volume cinema singing compilation, Golden Voices Of The Silver Screen. All of the tracks here trim over with the blemish energy that characterizes the films (one described by writer J. Hebraman as "MTV for the very young stars").

## Various Artists

The Rough Guide To The Music Of Indonesia  
WORLD MUSIC NETWORK  
WORLD MUSIC CD  
This survey of present day currents in Indonesian music gets off to a propelling start with CBMW's "Sambasaur" which pairs the thrilling bass rumble of bamboo gamelan with the shimmering tones of the Sundu region's bronze metallophones, their time signatures skewed to a Brazilian beat. Elsewhere Rhoma Irama offers scorching balladry that might be nearly as ornate an Empirac. Raj Kuba or a Bombay soundtrack. The elliptical other fingerpicking of Grup Bambu Pung chimers like a wisp of Gipsy Flam recording, as their two vocalists declaim the last words of a dying mythological hero. Happy and summing is the evaporating presence of expatriate Indo-Balkan prankster Sebati Hadas Mustajid, who having aligned in the South Pacific, has created a boisterous smash hit with Hammond B3 organ grooves ripe enough to have been plucked from a Jimmy Smith album. Then onwards to surly other styles such as dangdut and cendek modern, an idiosyncratic pop collection, contradictory as that sounds.

raster-noton, static  
senking, trial  
mokra, cliphop  
opiate and noto, opto

raster-noton, clear  
lippok, open close open  
carl m. v. hauswölff  
noto, endless loops (2)

raster-noton, limited  
kassette-tape, acids  
various, four ep-box  
compilation, new forms

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## in brief hiphop

Reviewed by Dave Tompkins

### Biz Markie Studda Step (warc)

Label: 12  
My dad man used to say, "It's better to stammer than dance like Hammer." Biz was one of the first to make DJ music with his mouth. On the previously unreleased bootleg (appears on Landspreads Cold Chain: Best Of Chenshi), Biz built-begins each line with De La's studda style from "Pease Porridge." Producer Salomon Remi, who remixed The Fugees out of the datatrans before The Score, loops the keyboard bliss from Art Of Nausea's "Moments in Love" the mantra to make a mumble-out and Quert Storm radio show. Meanwhile, Biz mentions Dr. Zhivago and the "Sexual Healing" 45 in the same dragon breath. "I try-dy I try to get it all off in a super dirty party proper without a doubt. Proper, doesn't necessarily mean buxal, rather it may refer to his infamous Toilet Stoop Rap

### Black Thought Hardware MCA

MC, AB12, 12  
Su The Roots' MC Black Thought stuns into an American True Value Hardware store to exchange his sister's sledshammer for a jive-head digger and a mic extension cord reaching off the way to Japan. DJ Krush socks the book and buildings get nervous. "He ain't like they're the projects with the crane," thinks Thought, who rhymed on Krush's Pileus LP. Krush uses a piano crispier than the action/legit. 40s B-movie actor Rondo Hatton while murky digestive effects soar through the vents from the cellar. As Black Thought says it's for the characterist cigarette cuts with bad nerves, old men in the barber shop using bad words. Datagum 41

### Highlighters Popcorn

Popcorn/The Funk 16 Corners  
MCA, 12, 12, 12, 12  
The 1969 release will crack popcorn impassive Oriole Rederbacher's glasses into a set of formal Cirk monodies Recorded in Indiana in 1969. Popcorn Popcorn is an instrumental steadily-wrenchy shut down the olfactory funk. Come spring, some horny geese are gonna come looking for that honked-on sax and the piping hot organ will lead the way. On "The Funk 16 Corners" the shouter shouts and the horns hit a myrtle 16 station. Times a more 43 consecutive times less than the Muckelbuck one did at the DC. Go. So includes liner notes by famous DJ. Includes Hanson. Both songs have open drum breaks if you. We me are one of those rodents who ya up and down. "Ooh-ooh there's the beat! Look! Look!" As

Charlie (not Chuck) Brown once said. "I'm looking! I'm looking!"

### OD & Iodine Anti-Christ make you

musica 12  
This is the result of holiday stress. Iodine sounds like he's hoisted in a Coupe Devit with Annie Christ and got let off at Loudun to bliss phonemes. Named after a poisonous halogen element, LA's iodine impersonated a bassline on FreeStyle Fellowship's second LP and bartonated "Oh my god I'm others for Christ's sake!" on 94's Project Blowed tape. Beneath the Surface producer OD drops an evil Christmas church-dang beat with a pained patient chugging along. With a flow as fast and cavernous as Self Jupiter, I-uh-dine asks "How can a child be happy on the day when he discovers that mommy and daddy have built him up to the biggest holiday of the year with outright lies?" Plus, "Rabbits don't make eggs." It's a wonderful life.

### Sach 7 Days To Engineer

Self-release, 12, 12, 12, 12, 12  
In the last while under my Comp. of 2000 I medallately noted the passing of PNC. Sach I am back. It was Sach's former Nance partner Yusuf Most who passed away last year. Sincere apologies to Sach Yusuf and the families of both for this careless error. On a more vibrant note, Yusuf appears on Sach's 7 Days To Engineer tape from 98 on "8th Day." He declares, "I believe in making good all over." Nowadays, you can't enter the word "mistake" without someone's off-key ass trying to crow the famous Nance hook of 95. "I used to sell mistakes Now I'm on PNC." Available on cassette only. 7 Days is yet another underground LA rule, written and recorded by the upright bassist in a week. 7 Days has that bumpy LA feel, not a G-Funk pulse but more like the dusky piano from Voices B-side (class: Who Falls Apart). Horns ring through sidewalk fissures and the clunch of Sach's drum machine blends with the ensuing crackle of his records, leaving gritty, impulsive tracks. On "Poetical Me" He brings the campaign "My verbal name is Sach for president in for the horn for the bass for the rock for turning out the place! But I must admit to standing time looking for space for my verse." While LA is known for speedometer-twirling PNC, Sach catches a measured breath and an all jazz loop while wailing about his equipment, self-worth and "holiness of the verb." Rap. And just how close is that tiny flute on "Engineered in LA?" Very deep. Over. Devoted To Yusuf is a scaling female vocal and guitar delicately plucked.

like eyebrows. Sach remembers "the taste of your nose" reminding us of his love for music and the Last Poets line "Good-better is women's tongue stuck all in your ear." 7 Days is dense-like only in length. It's a good reason to hang on to your toothpick, warmburner!

### Ty Break The Lock/The Tule

12, 12, 12, 12, 12  
Roanne Sharpe once asked "Why why why Ty?" He said OK to get by "Ty flows with a thick London Caribbean patois and the track of 'Break The Lock' is snare-illy with warm live Fender and a sparse Hughes. People will say Ty sounds like Roots. Manuella Fine — as long as he doesn't sound like the UK's Thrashpack. Ty flows questions at us like "Splash little fish can you swim in the pond? Are you that broke in the wall? Will your building respond?" On "The Tale," Ty gets cautiously like Herve Belloc as he meets up with a woman friend but finds herself checked, at the end of his grape. As the congas bumble, he goes into the bathroom to recompose spashes water on his face to in Sach Rick and comes out to find her "bust naked on the couch." No land details are given, but "let's just stay in my head by all"

### Various Artists Selections OOL

12, 12, 12, 12, 12  
Assembled by Ego first Chairman Mao and Prilly a Citizen Kane, this hip-sway mix of soul and funk has lots of radiant horns, harmonies that glide into the sun like a snare melodically and, of course, beats that I love you weeping into your flute of Jucy Juice. Check out the acoustic funk of Natural Four's "Baby Baby Come On." A Custom production so sweet that your teeth will fall out. Elephant's Memory a John Lennon project heard during Midnight Cowboy's acid trip, not only reminds us of Cypress Hill's "Latin Lingo," but also how ingenious Large Professor is for extracting Elephant's harmony while somehow burying the pachyderms in the track. Many a musician was married in the exorcism of these gems so it's good of Mao and Kane to share their record collection. Somebody told some fingerless exorcising the guitar rolls on Bill Sious "Marvin's Groove" while the break stampedes supposedly like the "Trust Your Chord" instrumental by The Jimmy Robbins Orchestra, but I'm on over my brow. With songs like "Ain't It Good Feeling Good" and "Feeling Good," it can only be all good. "Sweet Mary Lane" is a superline from behind with an Eddie Kendrick verse. This is the AP radio soul mix you expect to hear during 8 a.m. a sensile, when the bed breaks if I meet you in the spring. The dance ends nonchalantly with "Please It's Lost Forever" and you stroll out with your boy and a shamer stuck to the go on your rent-a-cop shoe. Makes me wanna put on my Keith Sweat sweater vest. As Saylor-D once said, "I forker you to dinner!"



# in brief jazz

Reviewed by Julian Cowley

## Bjornar Andresen/Sven Finnerud/Paál Nilssen-Love

*Erigne* Högström Records  
Punked Bjornar Finnerud (Högström) last June, but stylistic affinities with Paál Nilssen-Love were comparably drawn to his prior involvement and steadily unstable chords, and to some interplay between punchy right-hand figures and expansive pedal swirl. This recording made in Oslo in 1999 includes a trio and a quartet between Sven Finnerud and Andresen's Svensen double bass. These are framed by two duets, a brief opener and a long culminating improvisation, learning the bassist with loose limbed percussive Nilssen-Love. The closing dialogue, recorded at a later session, sounds poignantly repeated following the tightly crafted trio centerpiece.

## Rüdiger Carl & Sven-Åke Johansson/Dungelmann Med

*Swing* Högström Records  
A relaxed yet highly eventful conversation between the pair of old hands from the European free music community. Shared understanding enables them to shut platitudes and leave the obvious unsaid instead they follow confidently wherever their fancy or curiosity leads. Accidents are the primary means of exchange, with Carl doubling on clarinet and Johansson at times shifting to his drums or making arcane vocal pronouncements. As their playing has matured, the spark of concentrated desolation which drew both men into the particular musical field has spread into a self-assured glow, but the commitment to freedom remains as strongly felt as ever.

## Geoff Dugan

*Freebass* 501 015 CD  
Solo bass improvisation from New York, but not expect anything in the William Parker mould. The opening track resembles saturation bleeping heard from a bunker deep underground; ominous crackle and muffled roar. The assault gradually assumes higher definition until, after half an hour, its scratchy rasping suggests a gigantic insect foraging. No overblows, no effects, declares Dugan, leaving the technique behind the colored screen as opaque as the disc's jet black playing surface. Finally, unsavily high recording levels seem to be responsible. Low tactile grasping with the instrument becomes audible. Sufficiently uncompromising to secure a following.

## Evidence Live A La Casa

*América* MCA/World Circuit CD  
The group takes its name from a Telenovela.

Music composition eight others form the programme for the live recording, made in Montreal in 1999. Jean Derome on alto saxophone, Pierre Tanguay at the drums and Pierre Carter on electronic bass are adventurous musicians, yet their homage is played respectfully straight. There's a slightly glum quality to Carter's plugged-in bass which sometimes threatens to dampen the quirky spirit in Monks' music. It also contrasts oddly with Derome's pitched tone.

## Joe Fonda & Xu Fengxia

*Distance* 101 48 new CD  
Fonda elicits rich, rounded sounds from his double bass while striving to close its cultural distance from Xu Fengxia's guttural, a Chinese instrument colorfully resembling the Japanese koto. She in turn is listening intently while making conciliatory gestures through her animated playing. Titles such as "Mysteryland On The Peak Of A Glacier" and "Underwater Market Selling Clocks" smack of New Age frothiness, but the music is quiet and durable. Both musicians sing. Fengxia more obviously enhancing the event.

## Jonas Heilborg/Shawn Lane/ V Selvaag

*Times Of Evil* 101 48 new CD  
Bassist Heilborg joins forces with Indian percussionist Selvaag, who has worked with John McLaughlin, and Lane who has performed with Sam & Dave, Alex Chilton and Wayne Shorter. A heady brew on paper, but something is lacking from the fermentation process and spectacular displays of technical dexterity often suggest a shortage of the special musical yeast that produced vintage Louis when Larry Coryell harmonized Chace and Friends recorded last year's exemplary *Music Without Boundaries*. Highly accomplished, but missing ingredients. X

## Living Daylights Electric

*Rosary* 101 48 new CD  
This title and finally the opening out of Seattle play rock infused jazz while avoiding all the pitfalls that suggest. Melodically strong and rhythmically incoherent. Electric Rosary is every bit as satisfying as 1998's *Line 500 Pound Gor*. Bill Friesel guests here, a heavyweight improviser, but not an obvious presence, which says a lot for Jessica Luong on saxophone and flute, bassist Alex Langston and drummer Dale Panning. All play with impressive fluency and have freely tuned antennae. A mood altering antidote to drab days.

## Ramon Lopez Quartet Songs Of

*The Spanish Civil War* 101 48 new CD  
The impassioned voice of Benet Achary guiding on three of the 11 tracks, sets the tone for this set of anti-fascist anthems charged with the anti-authoritarian spirit of free jazz. Drummer Lopez has drawn together suitably intransigent collaborators with Dariusz Lato's crazy, solo and baritone declaiming over the low voices of Paul Rogers on double bass, plucked and bowed and Thierry Mallet's brass trombone. The songs lend themselves to free treatment, but there's plenty of quiet bonding within the group as well as rallying rowdiness.

## Simon Nabotov Trio Sneak

*Preview* 101 48 new CD  
The Cologne based punk trio undertook conservatory training in Moscow, studying with Mikhail Pletnev. He has the kind of even-handed virtuosity that implies he can play whatever he wants. Certainly he fits between styles with consummate ease, starting with a tribute to Steve Lacy that solves Monk in passing. But it's never shallow mimicry. Nabotov's voice has its own integrity. Accents full with academic precision and his improvisations can grow refined still he meets the swing prerequisite at every turn. Bassist Mark Helias and drummer Tom Raney expertly shadow his every move.

## Hans Poulsen/Peter Friis Nielsen/Louis Moholo

*Cricket* 101 48 new CD  
The electric bass of Dugan's Sweetheart Nielsen rumbles and roars, while bumbling drummer Moholo deploys the full range of his free-playing palette. Poulsen's guitar playing acoustic and electric is conservatively knotty in impact despite his acute readiness to use whatever technique or idiom suits the moment. Six pieces recorded in concert, four in the studio, in 1998, all configured as clusters of intensity, even when the performance seems relatively subdued.

## Don Preston Trio

*Transformation* (At-P) 101 48 new CD  
Preston remains best known for his work with Frank Zappa and the album kicks off obligingly with "The Eric Dolphy Memorial Barbecue". In groups led by Gil Evans, Carla Bley and Michael Mantler, Preston has done much to promote the synthesizer as a legitimate jazz instrument. *Transformation* however, is an acoustic piece set (excepting electronic melody on the occasionally contrived "Pinkston"). On it, 101 48 drummer Alex Cline and bassist, Joel Hamilton, on initial learning there are plenty of moments but about too often seem prolonged rather than developed, solidified to expand and ensemble playing gets only sporadically

## Hans Tammen & Dominic Duval

*The Road Bends Here* 101 48 new CD  
Duval's reputation as bass virtuoso has been established alongside robust figures such as Glen Spearman, David S Ware and Cecil Taylor. An acoustic guitarist performing duets with him must have a steady nerve. New Yorker Tammen enters the fray with vigor and conviction, and Duval proves an amiable giant, sympathetic towards underemphatic gestures and amenable to subtlety. Tammen has won plaudits as an innovator. Here he navigates well-defined streams of groove, circles and dry riddim, proving nonetheless a worthy partner for Duval.

## Ticklish Ticklish

*212* 101 48 new CD  
Phil Dumant, Kevin Hopper and Richard Sanderson delve deep into relationships of texture and paradox with this compellingly incoherent collection of looping and looping exercises. Seductive rather than hypnotic, evolving combinations seem designed to arrest the attention rather than embrace and satisfy. Overlapping cycles mark out time in their own image. Surfaces alter their appearance intriguingly as alignments shift.

## Various Artists Music Beyond

*Collectibles Intimate* 101 48 new CD  
Celebrating the Frankfurt label's first anniversary, this compilation from its first ten releases features a stellar cast of urbanite players, as might be expected from a catalogue created by trumpeter Franz Kögemann. The label's declared aim is to extend a reflective line that has run from its Berkeleian to Jimmy Guffey, and is perpetuated here by the likes of Tony Cox, Michael Moore, Ragesh Mehta, Enrico Rava and Ron Blake. Cool, calculated and impeccable.

## WOO Revelator Notes On

*What's What* 101 48 new CD  
WOO 101 48 new CD

## WOO Revelator The Theory Of

*Reverberated Effect* 101 48 new CD  
WOO 101 48 new CD

*Notes On What's What* is a collection of eerily messy NYC concert. Bonnie Kane wields wailing saxophone with a flare to Ayler and a hint of Lou Ligo. On fly she sounds remote and disembodied. Her doubling electronics vary between twitch and serious irritant. Ray Sage drums like a clockwork thumper. Eric Gustafson Chris Forsyth is a remarkably effective orchestrator of the group's sound, adept at the makeshift from. Unless you have a taste for chaotic remains and gear-smeared relics, the *Theory Of Reverberated Effect* is a more appealing point of departure, less raw more evidently shaped, yet pervaded by the same indifference to tidiness.

# in brief outer limits

Reviewed by David Keenan

## Christian Alati/Giuseppe Ielasi/Ruggiero Radaelli

*Chirrupi Alati/Giuseppe Ielasi/Ruggiero Radaelli*

Chirrupi Alati/Giuseppe Ielasi/Ruggiero Radaelli

Chirrupi Alati/Giuseppe Ielasi/Ruggiero Radaelli

Chirrupi Alati/Giuseppe Ielasi/Ruggiero Radaelli

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the aggressive snarl at which ideas are thrustled and discarded into the whole performance a real riotous atmosphere. Off Kiang is even better: with Lemke's raggedy strings humming and plucking through a series of environmental recordings from Thailand that seem him to lead to head with everything from traveling musicians through the low state of the down chorus.

## LOSD The Lower Range 600

FACTORY NO NUMBER CD

More intense inner ear soundings courtesy of the Laboratory Of Sonic Discovery. The *Lower Range* presents seven songs, sunk deep in an ever-accelerating snowmelt. Starting off with melody, almost subtle snowmelt circling at 25Hz, each track sees an incremental increase of 3Hz, eventually peaking at 25.3Hz. Bared beneath the ominous rising tone-line are seven disparate actions that peel off from the total core: mysterious rubbing and scraping, sloping glides, over some traced soprano, all bending the words into awkward shapes before dissolving back to black. Unhomed the pure snowmelt feel physically invasive and tingling in the air according to where you are in the room, and with each track lasting under a minute the random play option really comes into its own, creating jumpsuits of gravitational force.

## Angus MacLaurin Glass Music

REBEL CD 0012 CD

Glass Music presents a series of compositions by the American sound manipulator Angus MacLaurin, all of which, with the exception of two tracks which add timings of kalimba, theremin and boss guitar, are realized using nothing but finely tuned wirelesses. The ghost of Harry Partch is inevitably close by, whenever exotic soundscapes are involved, and while some of the tracks bear a superficial resemblance to his tuned percussive symphonies, Glass Music is much more eerily linear and elemental than that. The original drones that buzz and hum around the wet mists of the glasses form a spectral and/or around which darkly sonorous melodies clank and boom, and at times the landscape becomes so alien that it almost sounds electronic, bringing to mind the elegiac, more lush of Col.

## John Masoni with Sonic Boom The Soundroom Sessions

SPACE AGE RECORDS 00001 CD

Not so much a collaboration and more a case of Sonic Boom's recording artist, John Masoni, dressed up as, Sonoborn is a short burst of beautiful, disembodied

electronics that falls somewhere between the stored auroral beauty of Aphex Twin's *Selected Ambient Works* and Sade's luscious love songs. Dubbed *The Soundroom Sessions* due to the fact that work on the recordings invariably extended well into the early hours of the following morning, there's something peaceful and nocturnal about the results. The organ tones of "Organ" seem to breathe through the black space of zero gravity with the grace of arctic sonnets. Accordingly, *Phosphen* was going through some kind of crisis of confidence just before he hooked up with Sonic; it should set him right back on course.

## Memory Cells Night ANCIENT

ANCIENT CD

Night presents a thematic series of primitive, forlorn sketches, a melodic choral rumination on memory and place, some of which was originally recorded to accompany an "Ambient film" entitled *No People Here* and made by the group themselves. In its bleak frozen beauty it could almost be Russian, bringing to mind the eternally lingering camerawork of director Andrei Tarkovsky, with whom they share an obsession with the occult power of severe spaces. In reality they're a three piece from Dublin, combining sparse, single-note keyboard melodies with strident bass patterns, minimal percussion and slow paced accents, all beautifully rendered on a lush two-track portable. Only Bristol's *Houseboat* can leave you feeling so nostalgic for places you've never been.

## Metabolismus Spezialwortschall

AT 104 114 CD 114

Originally released in a run of 600 vinyl copies last year, *Spezialwortschall* is as fine an entrance point as any to the dizzying ethereal space of this Cologne collective. Active since the mid-80s, they've released somewhere in excess of 60 LPs and cassettes. Metabolismus model their workings on the break-bag manner of such monstrous krautrock ensembles as the original *Kosmos*, *Popol Vuh* and *Can*. They take the beautifully low growl of Can's *Caulis/Lobster* and swell it with all sorts of blooming analogue electronics, tinkering percussion and violin drone, creating a physically rocking yet beautifully mindbending sound collage. Their next project threatens to be a collaboration with original *Ohre* recording artist Lembus, whose few improvisatory sense should fit perfectly with their aesthetic of communal excess.

## Jean-Marc Montero Sensless

FLUXUS 001 CD

Smiles From Jupiter is a bandstand-rocking solo guitar performance with all the energy and solemnity of liner sets like *Arbitrarily*. Braxton's *For Alts*, Derek Bailey's *Adio* or Skip James' *Bagdad 1931* sessions. This is only the French-Canadian guitarist's second solo

cutting — the first being *Hung Around Shout* recorded for FMP in 1996 — yet his ability to channel internal dialogue into wily expressive bursts of peace and noise is already highly developed. At points the bustling blues of *Loren Mazzacane Connors* seems an obvious reference point. Montero has previously recorded alongside Connors as part of a quartet that also included Sonic Youth's Lee Ranaldo and Thurston Moore, and a personal cut like "No People Here" highlights the fact that Blind Willie Johnson is as much a part of his aesthetic as Keith Rowe. Fellow *Fluxus* guitarist Scott Stryker took off the CD with a couple of out-of-tune remarks that only slightly upset an otherwise flawless set.

## Alan Moore & Tim Perkins

The Highbury Working 70 16 00001

Alan Moore's transformation from the barfly who made it safe to venture back into superhero comics to his new incarnation as a shamanic chronicler of England's esoteric underbelly has been an unexpected but singularly satisfying development. From *Hell* is his comic book rumination on the occult background to the Jack the Ripper murders, a probably his most bogging read yet, and *The Highbury Working* released on ex-Bananas *Steve Severin's* label. Further confirms his tremendous descent into the ancient subterranean energies of his capital. Part science, part secret history, *The Highbury Working* sees Moore collating as much legend, apocrypha and unlikely coincidence as he can dredge up on London's Highbury district and spinning it out over electronic soundtracks put together by Tim Perkins. But the music itself is absolute over the worst kind of vaguely spooky sci-fi track that has no doubt accompanied countless late-night *Dr Who* videos, and what's worse is mixed at such a level that you can barely hear Moore's ecstatic narratives. To hear him read and unaccompanied would have been much more effectively chilling.

## Gert-Jan Prins Prince Love

DAUGHTER 001 CD

Daughter Gert-Jan Prins manipulates a bizarre array of mutant tape-loop electronics with improvisatory grace. Previously part of a trio with Sonic Youth's Lee Ranaldo and powerhouse drummer William Hooker, and a regular opening partner for such free European kings as Mats Gustafsson and Fred Van Hove, Prins is no stranger to the whiffling sonic assaults of low high energy wrestling. *Prins* (he consists of six live cats that range from painstakingly assembled rhythmic shapes through percussive *Member-style* blowouts, all animated with a gleefully stark breath that keeps each piece throbbing with the while, occasionally taking detours through dead end glitch-in-the-numbers territory, all at best *Prins* Love sounds the same cavernous roar as early *AFM*, charging with hysterical space with bustling static, power

## **charts**

## Playlists from the outer limits of planet sound

### Hektik Eklektik 15

**Diaphis** 1 (2 EP (Am))  
**Flute** 3 (Softcore) (Censorate) (B)  
**Yolles** 1 (Motelab #1) (Kitchen Matsuri)  
**Various** 1 (Civilians) (Nasty)  
**Various** <<No Watches, No Props>> (Fat Cat)  
**P-Tash** 1 (Compressed) (Library)  
**While** 1 (Chocolate) (Industries)  
**Tortoise** 1 (Standards) (Warp)  
**Various** 1 (Popping) (Crippled Dick Hot Wet)  
**Calla** 1 (Scavengers) (Quatermass)  
**Monokale** 1 (Granny) (Monokale/Balambale Computer)  
**Spattercoke** 1 (Call) (CELLDVG01)  
**Various** 1 (Matsuno) (Guns Unlimited) X11 (Iread)  
**Witches And Devils** 1 (At The Empty Bottle  
 (Kicking Factory))  
**2nd Gen** 1 (And I Or Us) (Novamut)  
 (English): Seite von der German Video Bank, 1989/3  
 r10-0-PT 000001, Begrüßung: Webkatalog 8-10 am e-mail  
 v10-0-PT 000001

### Best New Dub Fashions 2000

**Dry & Heavy** Jimmy James Dry & Heavy In The Jawz Of The Teen Green Teal  
**The Love Grocer** Rooking With The Love Grocer (Dub/Head Sugar B) (Product IG-Stone)  
**V-Hack** Dub Fictio (Low & Acidic)  
**Twilight Circus Dub Sound System** Dub Voyage (PI)  
**Sab Dubz** Dub In The Key Of Life (Two Ohm Hk)  
**Hydrophobics** Let The Light Shine (Dub-head)  
**Djrm** Dms (Hammerbase)  
**Goldmasters Alistars** Influence Of The Masters (Goldmasters)  
**Bucolic** Ozzyan Dub (BSI)  
**Dutweh Garage** Guidance In Dub (Charm)  
**Dubcannacean** Morgan 12" (Iforn & Function)  
**Digi Dub** Scran Dubbs (Dag Dub)  
**Xterminator Alistars** Dub Down Babylon (Xterminator)  
**Various** Dub Vol 2000 + 1 (Dub Dubz/G-Stone)  
L P L I N T E R V I E W : [www.bbc.co.uk/ontheroad](http://www.bbc.co.uk/ontheroad)  
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**Offbeat 15**

**Shiver Vex** (See Walker (Drag City))  
**Drifter Del Sol** (Comet Dog)  
**Pere Ubu** Terminal Town (Merge)  
**David Thomas** *Blume: The Messenger* (Cooking Vinyl)  
**Tortoise** *TNT* (City Slang)  
**Dr. Phosphorus** in My Bag (Commed/SSR)  
**Scornella** *Scornella* (Smells Like)  
**You La Tengo** And Then Nothing Turned Itself Inside-Out (Matador)  
**Sunk Youth** *A Thousand Leaves* (Geffen)  
**Black Box Recorder** *The Facts of Life* (Nude)  
**Red Snapper** *Our Arm Is Too Sassy* (Warp)  
**Ectogram** *At Behind the Wheelchair* (Ankhrust)  
**The Creatures** *Amno Amnus* (Indict)  
**Size Nine/Reptain** *In the Mode* (Mercury)  
**Lolita Goo** *Loving Blurs* (Too Pure)  
Compiled by Peter Jancovics & Jennifer DePinto. Offset: David G. 6/2 2 PM  
 New York, NY. Scornella's 2000 release. All other offsets are approximate.

## Table Of The Elements 15

**Harmon Colburn** Being Bored Cruel Of Death 7 (Fast)  
**Carobet Voltaire** Nag Nag Nag 7 (Rough Trade)  
**Raincoats** Olyshpade (Rough Trade)  
**Swiss Alps** Jane From Occupied Europe (Rough Trade)  
**Pop Group** She Is Beyond Good And Evil 3 BB 7 (Rough Trade)  
**Sleepers** Mimos Theory 7\* (Adolescent)  
**Gang Of Four** Fourpointone (EP) (Adolescent)  
**Subway Sect** Ambition 7\* (Rough Trade)  
**Arkansas May** Arkansas May EP (Subterranean)  
**Red Krayola** with Art And Language Corrected Stigmas (self-released)  
**James Blood Ulmer** Are You Glad To Be In America? (Rough Trade)  
**Nervous Gender** Music From Hell EP (Subterranean)  
**The Mekons** The Quality Of Mercy Is Not Women (Virgin)  
**The Silks** Cat Island  
**Young Marble Giants** Colossal Youth (Rough Trade)  
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 http://www.murr.com/tableoftheelements.com

## The Office Ambience

**DJ Catic** *Sauz* (Six-pack)  
**John Cale** *New York in the 1960s* (Table Of Drift)  
 Elements (promo)  
**Thomas Brinkmann** *Rock* (Max Erret)  
**Bonnie Prince Billy** *Easy Does the Road* (Domino)  
**Mattman & James** *To Find Is A Chance To Lose* (Metatone)  
**Charlemagne Palestine** *Alloy* (Alloy Murgheim)  
**The Fall** *A World Bewitched* (Asthm)  
**Thighpaulanderson** *Thighpaulanderson* (Esakron)  
**Hugo Race & True Spirit** *Long Time Ago* (Gästerhouse)  
 Various *Family Affairs From Berlin* (Lieblichling)  
**John Dwyard** *6/6 Plunderpieces 96* (f.org)  
**Alexander Balorescu** *Various Lumine Lumine* (Scoubagold)  
**Alan Silva & Doyen** *Thomas Transmission* (Metatone)  
**David Thomas & Two Pale Boys** *Surf's Up!* (Gästerhouse)  
**Richard Pryor** *And It's Deep Too* (Warner)  
 Archives/Rhino  
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## Gentlemen Take Polaroids: D&T Politics

# print run

New music books devoured, dissected, dished

## Dream Brother: The Lives And Music Of Jeff And Tim Buckley

By David Browne

PHOTOGRAPH BY HENRI LITTON

One of the ironies of *Dream Brother* is that its whole rationale is an interlarding of the lives of Tim and Jeff Buckley in alternating chapters, even though we learn at every point just how Tim did it but forgot his son, while the one thing Jeff wanted to avoid was any presentation of himself as an extension or reprise of the father he barely knew. Tim had split up with Jeff's mother, Mary Gubert, before Jeff was born; besides the shared live and a half octave range of their wonderful voices, Jeff kept a box somewhere representing all that was left of his dad. Tim questioned about the son he had omitted to mention in an interview with *The New York Times* responded somewhat automatically: "Yeah, Jeffrey. Great kid." But sequenced together their stories become part of an intensive transcendence myth played across the medium of the rock industry.

The doubling of the tales of father and son and their early deaths by misadventure inevitably plays towards the prophetic, the romantic and the doomed. That, more than the music itself, is the book's most persistent hook. David Browne makes the story for every possible moment of prophecy or pathos, from the time when Jeff would set in his highchair and bring a spoon "as if keeping the beat" to the moment his drowned body finally resurfaced at the musical symbol of Bowie Street. Looks like he could be wounded" is the first thing Browne noticed about Jeff as he researched an article on the Buckley phenomenon back in 1993, when the singer was attracting crowds and record label executives, to a series of gigs at the Sire-Cala in New York's East Village.

The other side of Browne's narrative—how the music industry sought to play both artists equally homes in on Jeff as someone who in an era in which rockstar property were emerging as a marketable genre, arrived pre-figured for fame. There is a brilliant description of Jeff's musical coming out in New York at a Greetings From Tim Buckley tribute concert in 1991. Professionally an unknown, yet appearing alongside the likes of Richard Hell and Elliott Sharp on the strength of his

brilliant, the event is directly ignominious revelation. Following the others' lead, homages, Jeff gave a straightforward soulful performance of "I Never Asked To Be Your Mountain," giving it the voice and the industry flopped: it was all they had wanted but never got from Tim in his experimental years. In his concert review, *The New York Times* singled out Jeff's high-droning voice as an echo of his father, but Jeff himself said it better when he describes his reception: "It was like the fucking second coming."

The Jeff Buckley story trails off when Browne begins to narrate how his life became sucked into the contours projected onto it by Columbia and Sony. A lot of space is devoted to detailing the production of his studio album *Grace* (whereas many of his father's nine releases get a couple of pages or so). But the last few chapters on the younger Buckley get swamped by the facts of a marketing and management machine so intensive that it basically becomes the level where his consistency, identity, continuity and mortality let alone his artistry is soaked. Browne lists the minutiae of each photo shoot, the rapidly escalating sales following MTV's screening of "Last Goodbye" and on the overend of \$3.1 million in promoting *Grace*. Designated "recapable" from the follow-up album, the industry thus locked Jeff's future into its own agenda.

All of this is truly pertinent, even as it draws the attention away from the music. Perhaps it's because of the distance, and perhaps it's because of the era, but a more generous account of Tim's development emerges. You can piece together moments in his musical education: his youthful musical associate Larry Beckert supposedly turned him on to the likes of Ravi Shankar and Stockhausen while others opened him up to Sade, Jimi Hendrix and Balinese music. His love of Miles Davis comes clearly into focus—Lorco was inspired by *In A Silent Way*. Around here Tim started to part company amicably with his record companies, marketing plans drifting further into the domains of jazz and a kind of freedom carnal ecstasies. The industry touchstone for experimentation was Sgt. Pepper (even in the late 90s, the Columbia line on Jeff's posthumous four-records were that he was on the verge of making a major record like Sgt. Pepper). After *Sonsbecker* he veered towards manmade animal sounds and

Contemplating fatherhood: Tim Buckley

perform a capella pieces, until Jerry Goldblum, War's producer, was obliged in to recreate Tins' image on *Grovers* from L.A. If it's an unpleasant series of Tins' occasional brooding, racism and homophobic enmeshes from Browne's account, it also gives tantalising glimpses of unfinished projects like his Joseph Conrad-inspired album.

His narrative of Jeff's life is so skewed by the search for the journalistic or industry payoff that it resembles nothing so much as one of those homunculi produced as educational tools, where the most sensitive parts of the body are blown up into massive disproportion. In Jeff's case, his eyes and his death. Tamara Adams, the daughter of Bert's manager Herb Cohen, remembers of Jeff: "There was something behind his eyes that was so far away and dark, like a deep pool. The sadness and melancholy were always there." And that's almost as much as anyone has to say about him. Again, the book is useful for tracking influences — from Bush and Kix, to Edith Piaf and Billie Holiday, to The Smiths and the Cocteau Twins, and his growing obsession with soulful music though such details are often namechecked. What you don't really get is a developed sense of what makes them tick musically, or of the musical context. Browne doesn't even provide a discography.

Documentary demands that its heroes die into myth, and the industry that they are reborn into product. This is the message that the book gives out most strongly, from the first moments, when Jeff drifts further out into the Wolf River singing "Whole Lotta Love" to the last, when his family requests a DNA sample from his beard body to be tested against future bogus paternity suits. In between are a medley of acquaintances who are sure they remember something uncertain about the way he held his shoulder in the month before he died, and the activities of Columbia which lands him with a film crew at his first recording session as "part of a process of preserving Jeff's history for posterity".

His notebooks are full of a disconnected and freeform potboiler that is perhaps a symptom of the fact that their pages were the only arena in which he was actually allowed to explore the degree of self-expression that he was always being permitted or having attributed to him. But the darkest, funniest and most ironic verdict on the life of the rock-and-roll comes from the surreal film script *July-Dr*. Condoned (which Tim penned with Dan Gordon) at a time when he was desperately looking for another avenue into artistic freedom. The story goes: after being rescued from the desert by a culture in a postapocalyptic Tim is confronted by manager Herb Cohen who suggests a libretto. Then, at a concert at the Troubadour, Tim gets to destroy sections of the club by insulting detractors behind their "screaming mangled bodies" before beholding the first row of fans with a gavel. You'd be hard put to find a better way to subvert Browne's late-romantic ballad.

MARK PITCHER

## A Century Of Recorded Music: Listening To Musical History

By Timothy Day

THE UNIVERSITY PRESS, HEBE 120

Baroque recorded music and 41 pages, including record company advertisements, vanish from the pages of last month's *Wire*. Every age, however, is memory of recorded music, and there goes the rest. Our perception of music — what it sounds like, how it's made and what it's for — is now defined so thoroughly by the recording

The earliest recordings were extremely limited and very expensive. A 1903 recording of Verdi's *Ermani* took up 40 single-sided discs and a complete set of Beethoven's 9th Symphony (recorded in 1913) cost about £2 when the average weekly wage was \$1.66 (51.33). This expense ensured that from the outset the recorded repertoire showed prejudice against contemporary work, not that much of Webern or Schoenberg would have survived on gramophone records of their own time. The restricted frequency range of acoustic recordings left all but the most stentorian of music hall singers at a

imposed on spontaneity.

As the technology improved so the influences that recording and its environment brought to bear began to change music dramatically. When a question of interpretation had to be resolved, economists batted it out with artistic criteria. Performances recorded for the Cochet record label, Supraphon, were founded on the teaching methods of Jindřich Bělohradský, who drilled his students at the Prague Conservatory in disciplines that enabled them to wake up in the middle of the night and be shown a score open at page 32, bar 4, and to know without hesitation at exactly what speed



discovery that we can only guess at what the world was like when music was available only by attending a live performance or reading a score.

All the more important, then, to have a wider range of studies that analyse recording history and its complex effects on listening. I must admit to a pang of disappointment when I first thumbed through the pages of Timothy Day's book. Quite unreasonably, I was expecting an archaeology of bizarre Russian experiments, Japanese field researchers armed with wire recorders, missionary exploits in Africa and similar exotica. Instead, Day limits himself to a century of classical music. His reason for this is persuasive. Until far more research is carried out, a global history that encompasses all types of music is out of the question. Better to narrow the focus in order to encourage others to widen it in the future with their own specialisations.

disadvantage and even that the gramophone apparatus, the engineer feared the worst when Russian opera singer Chabakov stood ten yards away from the recording horn. His chest stopped bare like a prize fighter.

Those primitive conditions of acoustic recording," writes Day "with everyone crammed as close as possible to the recording horn, with a percussion player attempting to strike a metal sheet but missing and knocking the singer unconscious, not to mention many players found difficult, uncooperative, undisciplined and exhibiting. For many musicians the process of recording was inhibiting in itself. Suddenly their mistakes and imitations were made permanent, allowing for repeated pursuit. 'We are all victims of the triachery of the wax' wrote Poulenc, who was not alone among composers and critics in regretting the strictures this new invention

was, a conductor habitually took the passage." Rohan would record a symphony with anything up to 120 stops and resoles. His method was regarded as "economically insane" in the USA, where costs and union regulations meant that a 40-minute symphony was shied from into a two-hour recording session. Many conductors and critics have registered a disquiet for the artificiality of recording. Rightly so, in some respects, since a supposedly perfect analogue performance might conceal hundreds of errors and imperfections, all spliced into a calculated illusion of authority and perfect virtuosity. In the digital era, of course, virtually anything is possible.

From punk onwards there has been a tendency for musicians and small fry entrepreneurs to believe they are the sole inventors of small label subversion, yet Day's listing of the classical repertoire released on

disc reveals the overwhelming importance of tiny independent and semi-independent labels throughout the history of electrical recording. "The dramatic expansion of the repertoire," he writes, "was to a great extent the result of the creation of a multitude of new labels produced by a host of small companies. Labels such as Kentrol, Cosimo, Uramo, EMS and Argo released anything from obscure organ music to Edgard Varese, thereby underlining the fact that the business end of the recording business has always been counterbalanced and in some respects enhanced, by ideologists who care about music more than profit."

This is one of the underlying themes of Day's book. Any study of recording must confront the reality of the business. Gramophone records were land in their CD form still and relatively expensive. Continuing production requires a market, and this makes grow throughout the 20th century partly as a result of initiatives that valued cultural health over commerce. Day quotes the editor of the *Gramophone* in 1954, who believed that a healthy audience for music was a direct consequence of "the redistribution of purchasing power brought about by the Welfare State" the principle had been adopted that music, and art and literature and drama, like education, health and social security, were universal goods which ought to be generally available regardless of the ability to pay. "Over the past 20 years" such principles have been systematically dismantled in Britain, which perhaps helps to explain why the latest version of the high street record shop devotes more space to mobile phones than to music.

Radio plays large in Day's story. Without radio, recorded music would not have enjoyed the mass exposure that has defined the past century. This only exacerbated the problem for the critics. As recordings became more familiar, even a kind of highbrow Muzak, "to the generation who had discovered music before recordings" music in the second half of the century had become too familiar, had become less miraculous than it had once been. "Such sentiments can also have a resonance for those of us who discovered music through a mixture of live performance, radio, television and record collections. Music can only intermittently be separated from the commercial enterprise that supports it. In 1951 a government committee discussed the proposal for compulsory legal deposit of sound recordings. The chairman opened the discussion by asking, 'What is the point of this? Anyone who wants to hear a record goes into a shop'—understandably, since he is curator of Western art music at the Sound Archive of the British Library. Day concludes with his analysis of the problems faced by sound archivists. This may not be the most gripping of subjects for the non-lexarians among us but without the archive this fascinating book could not exist."

DAVID TOOP

## Landing On The Wrong Note: Jazz, Dissonance and Critical Practice

By Andy Hebble  
ROUTHLEDGE Pbk \$19.95

My high school orchestra teacher was a lovely, grizzly, cigar-smoking old drummer who hot-boxed his station wagon and later 'gaped with John Cage' on his lengthy credentials sheet. In a few short semesters, he managed to squeeze precision out of our ragtag troupe of loiterer volunteers, marching band cast-offs and string ensemble virgins, and it was time to try something a little different. 'Improviser!' he boomed one day. 'Don't be afraid to occupy the solo! Just play!' We collectively banged out a stiff, metered pattern and each celest took a 30-second solo. I sustained through my share time, trying to earnestly stay with the herd and avoid soloing against the grain, against me. It was painful. I had been trained to avoid hitting the wrong notes. Worse, I believed in notes being right or wrong in the first place.

Though Andy Hebble's *Landing On The Wrong Note* probably won't inspire an Ornette-sized overthrow of 'stay in the lines, cultural conservatism it does introduce some fascinating new ways of looking at jazz history and articulating a jazz-informed criticism. Hebble, a literature professor and the founder of Concord's influential Gospel Jazz Festival, always picks jazz as a model for discussing some pressing contemporary issues of cultural citizenship, identity, representation, authorship and 'dissonance.' This text is, especially important to Hebble, the invisible wrong note, this given meaning to difference and jeopardizes our 'lumpy notion of public harmony.' Dissonance is our way of life in America. Duke Ellington once remarked: 'We are something apart, yet an integral part.'

Lurking beneath Hebble's ambivalent exploration of the conjoining pairs of flighty jazz and starchy shell literary criticism is this fundamental question of wrongness. By comparing the challenges of jazz practice with the linguistic localities of modern literature, Hebble approaches the idea of 'dissonance,' or non-agreement, as a symptom of the modern condition and its discipline-minded political practices. Take that, *Wynton Marsalis*! Just as we are nudged in the direction of sensible narratives and a logic of beginning-middle-end coherence, those same invisible hands caw the best notes when they fall far sharp or offbeat. But then, again, haven't some of this world's truly interesting moments (see Christopher Columbus) come by way of misdirection and mistake?

Hebble gets off on the good foot, and many of London's best moments tread this sticky cultural line of right/wrong. His first chapter on the poetics of jazz is especially informative. Placing jazz alongside literature's modernist turn, Hebble draws interesting intellectual alliances between the evolutionary paths of tones and sentences. Ezra and Bird. Just as representational crises tagged at the power of



Free to battle: Charles Gayle

the word, new jazz began taking old jazz in its finger-fars by disrupting solid traditions of melody, harmony, notation or rhythm. In describing free jazz's departure from representational forms, Hebble takes up the decades-old debate on jazz's essential blackness. The race issue is revisited in his chapter on the problems of representation found in the work of the Chicago-based Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM). A particularly strong section, Hebble analyses the ways the AACM and The Art Ensemble Of Chicago engage history in a dialogue through song and manifesto, linking jazz history with the politics of black American existence. Hebble's *No Baraka* when it comes to race, but the gingery approach suits the chapters fine. How do performance and historical reclamation affect one's ability to underline the cogent historical-political aims of one's art? And what ethical system assaults heinous historical meta-narratives but less resistant knowledge without loss?

He sort of touches on these questions in a useful chapter on jazz literature. Examining the unstable facts and almost improvised feel of Charles Mingus's autobiography, Hebble argues that the idea of historical revisionism heard in AACM and AEC is the dynamic: one reads in Mingus's self-narrated history. By continually revising and rewriting an unrecoverable past, perhaps Mingus's literary strategies can be re-read as an assertion of one's responsibility to represent, re-name and

re-historicise oneself in a world that prefers easy categorisation.

If the micro-physics of jazz terrain were dissonant acts designed to grow at our culture's conservative build, what relationships can be forged between center and periphery? He picks up this accessibility point throughout the book, first with AEC's 'difficult music' and then with a detailed trial on the pop culture appeal of John Zorn. Hebble closes the book with a thought-provoking chapter on controversial saxophonist Charles Gayle. Though the poetics of his free jazz playing scream progressive, Gayle himself, well, screams and raves against homosexuality and gay rights during his incendiary live sets. How do you deal with a conundrum like Gayle?

In the end, Hebble's book is about the ways we deal. The notes, contradictions and weird conditions of modern life won't disappear; it's just a matter of recognizing, answering and maybe even solving those burn notes. Should we let well-bringing Phibes. Does some slack, because he was miles ahead? What does it mean that Gayle can comfortably juggle his homophobia and jazz hats? And how did Ornette get so good by being so bad? Perhaps if Hebble had dedicated more time to answering some of his own questions or unpacking the assumptions behind right and wrongness, London's cross-disciplinary approach wouldn't have fostered our halfway through. Then again who am I to say what the right thing would have been?

NINA HUI

## Free Jazz Black Power

By Philippe Carles & Jean-Louis Comolli

HOOD R&B 5/94

First published in 1971 from the same Parisian imprint as Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*, this book is very much a product of May 68. It's an impassioned, informed account of the roots and consequences of free jazz, the book to accompany the epoch-making album *BYO! (Acutel)* recorded at the time. Although the title is English, it's written in French, and still hasn't been translated. Carles and Comolli spring from the scene that produced *Orchestra Du Cimetière* and Jean-Luc Godard. Although Comolli's writings on film were embraced by the structuralists, his writings on jazz were ignored. During the heyday of rock, the idea that French intellectuals could have anything important to say about black music must have seemed ridiculous.

However, as 68ers, Carles and Comolli were in a uniquely advantageous position to explain free jazz's challenge to black music's role as entertainment (or as they put it, "distraction"). A historical sketch — slavery, reconstruction, post-War exclusion of rights, the Black Panthers — occupies two thirds of the book. It has an urgency that could only come from writers who had experienced tear gas and truncheons themselves. Untouched by the dogmatic fetishism that reduces criticism to gentlemanly consensus, they understand jazz as a cry of resistance. Their historical materialist analysis is alert to contradiction: African improvisation versus European fairy-tale utopianism; transcendence, sonic matter versus formal abstraction. The authors, last but for the confounding energies of the real, resist in stinging analyses of Archie Shepp's *On The Night* and Ornette Coleman's *Free Jazz*.

The French angle brings out irony: historical radicals which a more familiar view — the kind of anti-racism favoured in cultural studies, say, which is abstract and moralistic — cannot admit. Philippe Carles was brought

up in Algeria as a "pied noir", and initially accepted a colonist ideology. He later to Racial France, and particularly preferred French jazz to the American models. When he emigrated to Marseille in 1962, he was uncomfortable with the racism and chauvinism of the ex-colonial community, but it was only as a medical student in Paris that he recognised Algeria's right to self-determination. Rather than an exotic novelty, the adoption by jazz musicians of Muslim names and African costume was a direct challenge to his prejudices. Over the course of the 60s, like many of their generation, Carles and Comolli began to understand their infatuation with American mass culture was riven with contradiction. *Free Jazz* and *Amn Baraka* aka LeRoi Jones's classic *Blues People* helped them establish a political and aesthetic orientation.

For Carles and Comolli, free jazz is like Qadaffi or punk, an absolute break with business as usual: one that ushers in unheard possibilities for musical and political action. They emphasise the rage and sarcasm in the music, its openness to contingency and its scorn for standard manoeuvres. They interpret its internationalism — Yusuf Lateef's Arabic motifs, Coltrane's ransacking of World Music scales, Don Cherry's hobnob in Africa — as a musical version of Malcolm X's realisation that the black struggle must connect to worldwide resistance to American capitalism. For the authors, Baraka is the most reliable guide to this racial realisation (Stokely Carmichael is cited for thinking it could be solely cultural). In 1971, the book's thesis that racial conflict is but "one moment" in the basic conflict between capitalism and those it exploits would have been rejected by a separatist Baraka. The fact that Baraka concluded a recent interview (*The Wire* 2013) by calling himself a "Panor-Leninist" makes the re-publication of *Free Jazz: Black Power* most timely. As Baraka pointed out in his *Wire* interview when the social base is transforming, things move faster — connections are exposed, social relations are exposed. Written at a high point in the struggle, *Free Jazz: Black Power* hasn't

dated at all. Indeed, though the new discography is welcome, it comprises a brilliant page of "reissue" albums, plus 28 pages of canon selections, including CDs by Bailey and Brötzmann, as well as later arrivals like Eugene Chadbourne. It's right that for this new edition, Carles and Comolli have added a postscript manifesto of a preface rather than an update on the last three decades. Given the world-historical scope of their polemic, detailing the gloomy story of the 80s and 90s would be bathetic in the extreme. As they put it: "There's no jazz history because there's no jazz outside history."

Using free jazz as a springboard, Carles and Comolli in effect wrote a primer in black history, the history of American capitalism seen from below — and so increasingly, with globalisation, everyone's history. *Free Jazz: Black Power* is no substitute for Baraka, but its theoretical slaps and streetwise scholarship (a plethora of footnotes invite misquoting of slave memoirs, underground histories and revolutionary tracts) provide essential backup to his soaring essays.

RON WATSON

## Thérémín: Ether Music And Espionage

By Albert Cloupin

UNIVERSITY OF LUNDIN PRESS H&B 5/94

The sound of the theremin, the first truly electronic mass instrument of the 20th century, is familiar enough. Its unearthly wail was heard in underdog low-budget science fiction and horror films, much less *The Beach Boys' "Good Vibrations"*, to ensure, using notoriety. But more unconventional than the sound of the theremin, or the means by which it was played, was the life of its inventor, Lev Sergeyevich Theremin, born during the sunset of Russia's Tsarist era, would witness and often participate in many of the cultural upheavals that shaped the decades to come. Were one to imagine an offspring of the divinely inspired mystic Nicola Tesla and Woody Allen's historically ubiquitous character, Zelig, the results couldn't more resemble Leon Theremin.

To say that he enjoyed celebrity, in the greater sense of the term, is to speak of a comparatively brief period of his adult life in the 1930s, when he made a splash on the American stage and media. Before his eclipse and controversial return to Stalinist Russia, Leon Theremin could boast of ensembles devoted to his unusual instrument, which was played with the motion of hands within an electromagnetic field. Such groups would perform at New York's Carnegie Hall and in the house orchestras of popular radio programmes. Recognised for his brilliance both as an inventor and an individual possessed of a unique musical sensibility, Theremin was sought out by celebrities and America's captains of industry.

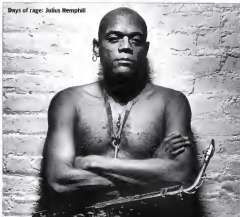
Then, as suddenly as he kept into public prominence, Theremin vanished from

American soil. Many thought that he had died. In the minds of many at the time, he might as well have. But his career continued in Russia, albeit in a different vein. Theremin was responsible for innovations and refinements in spy technology, most notably for bugging and other surveillance techniques that entered the popular vocabulary of the 1960s. Was he forced to labour on Stalin's behalf? Did his musical investigations continue? These questions, among many others raised by the contested accounts of Theremin's later life, prompted composer and music professor Albert Cloupin to undertake a research project lasting some 13 years. All that work bears fruit in *Thérémín: Ether Music And Espionage*. Cloupin's dogged pursuit of the truth about Theremin's Russian years, combined with prose that speaks with equal facility to the lay reader and the longtime electronic musician, has yielded a top-flight biography destined to remain the defining portrait of its subject.

Seemingly few if any of the spooky vibrations made by the theremin or its inventor escaped Cloupin's attention. The author documents the influence exerted by the enigmatic Russian visionary on a gallery of historical figures as far apart as V.I. Lenin, Henry Cowell and The Beach Boys. Of the latter, Cloupin lavishes high-quality attention on composer/producer Brian Wilson's efforts to integrate the theremin (or more accurately, the Tonnem, a touch-board variant made by Hollywood session musician Paul Terner) into his magnum opus, *"Good Vibrations"*. The groups' quest for a readability version of the instrument led them to Robert Moog's doorstep. The BBs passage typifies a Melvin's worth of recurring encounters between Moog and Theremin's musical legacy. In his planspanned yet moving introduction to *Thérémín*, Robert Moog recalls an initial visit to the Manhattan apartment of the then-elderly theremin virtuoso Clara Rockmore to repair her instrument, which had languished in storage for decades. Though she was a stern taskmaster, Moog recalls his satisfaction at embarking her to play *Alma*. The American inventor describes his feeling of being linked spiritually to his hero Theremin during the repair work, which Moog deems "the high point of my professional career."

In the four decades since its launch, this confounding instrument has slid from extreme popularity to obscurity and back again into the limelight. The theremin might be the ultimate hobbyist's build-at-home kit, but it has proved equal to the demands of European concert soloists. It has been played by classical composers, film score session players and, most recently, even heretical "buses" artists such as Jon Spencer. Yet, as Robert Moog points out, Leon Theremin contributed so much more than just another novelty to a century strewn with the same — he effectively invented electronic music, opening composers up to a new timbral range of infinite possibility.

RICHARD HENDERSON



Days of rage: Julius Hemphill

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Run by: Simon Goertz, Felix Kloppeck

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Brief History: Founded in autumn 1958, Grob was started to document a flow of improvised music's fleeting, magic moments. The name Grob comes from the German word for 'rough' and fits the intention of the label well: to produce editions of 100 CD-Rs quickly and release them in simple cardboard covers. Four CD-Rs (Beatshopchach, Himes, Old Raps, Eugene Chadbourne) were produced in the year before the move to traditional CDs was made in December 1999.

Statement of intent: The founders publish the music they want to have published. Grob wants to intervene in the fields of improvised music, free electronics, New Music and free jazz, and to speed up the exploration of these edges. It is the intention of the producers to support and publish the kind of improvised music that does not submit to the well-known clichés of post-serialism: free jazz and free rock, but comes up with different perspectives and different insights about commerciality and intelligent compatibility. Grob, like many other labels and editors, want to unveil the productivity of a scene which is in fact too diverse to be called a scene.

Other activities: Simon Goertz teaches mathematics at the University of Wuppertal. Felix Kloppeck works as a journalist, lecturer and curator of a festival at the Stadtgarten in Cologne.

Joseph Suchy is a freelance musician.

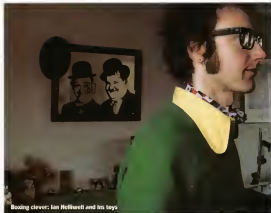
Future plans: Two Steinbock CDs, plus releases by School Of Velocity, Panchetta/Voice Choir/Kneiger, Dachtel Music, Hugh Davies solo, Stephen Wener solo, The Residents, Eugene Chadbourne's After Unleash and many many more.

Choice cuts: Himes Electric Choir + Tichich, Keith Rowe Himes, Guitar Solo

(info and enquiries: Felix Kloppeck)

# multi media

Peter Shapiro meets Ian Helliwell, Britain's premier Super 8 auteur



Bouding clever: Ian Helliwell and his toys

In a craggy, chilly attic apartment overlooking the prime retail space of Brighton's Lanes, a grumbling, rumbling machine relic from the 1950s that was designed to cure backaches with shortwave generated heat comes to life. Instead of radiating warmth, though, the Megatherm now emits a pattern of drones and Geger counter clicks in time with the blocks of colour and dancing scratches being projected onto it by film maker/musican/last of the cule-queste aristocrat/chronosnail Ian Helliwell. Like a proud father showing off his son's fingerpaintings, Helliwell moves over to some jerry-rigged boxes connected to an old intercom unit and produces a miniature world of sounds somewhere between Pan Sonic and Vladimir Vasschewsky.

Part hunter-gatherer, part outsider artist, Brighton-based Helliwell has spent the better part of the last decade scouring the South Coast's jumble sales for bits of ephemera of a bygone era when idiosyncrasy and progress wasn't so sure of itself, so all encompassing, so threatening. But unlike the legions of post-atomic hepcats wallowing in the kitsch of eight-track carriages, MiniMoogs and Tlo statuettes, Helliwell prizes his car boot loot for their use value rather than for the status they confer. On Helliwell's business card is a portrait of the artist as a mild scientist. He probably got the image from a 1969 issue of *Popular Mechanics*; he picked up all a bring-and-buy sale in Goring-by-Sea, but with the lab technician's hypo-aimed glasses it seems like Helliwell's debased self portrait. If that's

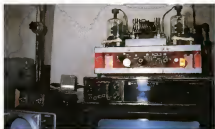
indeed what it is, then it offers a peripatetic glimpse into the psyche of one of Britain's maverick alchemists, our mild-mannered hero, just barely smiling and sporting a hero's like Richard Hatch in *Battlestar Galactica* holding two test tubes (one bubbling) standing on the verge of mixing Sussex modcons and railroad gin.

Helliwell is one of Britain's premier Super 8 film makers, but although his films have syncretic affinities with the work of legendary experimental auteurs like Harry Smith and Stan Brakhage, Helliwell is entirely self-taught and developed his aesthetic in isolation from history and tradition. "I bought this slide projector from a jumble sale — 40 pence!" he says of the genesis of his calling. "I didn't have any photographic slides, I just had mounts and started to put bits of plastic inside and then got some left to pans and started to make abstract paintings, really, on the slides. I'd never really done anything like that before." I don't really have any exposure to Super 8 or film at all when I was growing up. Initially buying projectors, that's what interested me first, rather than actually making the films. Slides were the things that got me into using projectors and projected light. It was a natural progression to get a cine projector and start experimenting with bits of film and buying a camera. It didn't come from an interest in photography or anything, it was more to do with being able to work with the equipment and being able to do things with the film itself — handle it and draw on it and scratch it. "I started in '92, I think it was. I got some film

and started scratching and colouring it in these little fragments of that because I made this film and then, 'What do I do with it now?' I didn't have any connections or know how the short-film scene operated or anything like that. So, in the end, I just cut it up into loops. It was very naive really. In '93 I did this so-film. That was, again, very simplistic, live action stories about an android going out of control. And then I did a film that was just bits of leader film stuck together and that was the first real abstract film that I did. Ever since then I've been trying out little methods of approaching Super 8 film."

His methods include keeping the film with tea-bags and in his recent *Rectangular Motion* and his masterpiece, 1997's *Crystallization*, and bombarding an ancient TV screen with high frequency signals on *Patterns Of Interference*. But unlike Smith and Brakhage, who took a haphazard approach to the sound on their work, Helliwell creates electronic soundtracks for both his films and for reels he finds at sales, like the anti-war epic made by soldiers in 1971, or a public information film about the Post Office Tower. "I had always been interested in electronic sounds, and then I was really interested in the equipment and all the gaudy, but I didn't have any knowledge about what to do," he says. "How could I find a way to develop this interest into something? And that was just by teaching words to the circuit board — you didn't have to actually know what the components did, you just experimented with the sounds themselves, you could just listen

and get the soldering iron and solder "I like particular boxes," he continues. "I like to customize boxes and make them look a certain way. The Megatherms, I got that at a boot sale six or seven years ago, that was just really inspiring, the actual casing of the unit itself. I thought, 'I've got to make something out of that, that's a fantastic piece of apparatus.' Quite a lot of the time the circuit is just a nine volt plastic toy. You take it apart, throw away the plastic and you've just got the circuit board and the battery, and then you just get jack sockets and several resistors and touch them on, and then input sockets from another tone generator and see how that will modulate the sound. You have to look for the right box for the right number of knobs at the front so suit what you've got. It's kind of random in a way, but with a kind of approach so that there's a pattern that you can follow. But you don't quite know what's going to happen. I just went 'I've got a sound that sounds good, solder that and try to catch as many different settings from the switch so all those settings will be a different sound. Most of those generators, once I've done a few pieces with them, I take them apart and re-solder them, so that will hopefully keep it quite fresh. I used to have an old monophonic synthesizer, but after a while you've used up all the sounds. With these boxes, it's always an adventure. There's always something to discover." *C. Helliwell's Improvised electronics group Electron Gun released a seven-track CD, Substation, in March on Integrated Circuits*



## GO TO:



### Pinknoises

www.pinknoises.com

It's clear that the utopian idea of electronic music being genderless and devoid of rock's cult of personality is long gone. As Simon Reynolds observes in his book *Generation Ecstasy*, "DJ culture is distinctly masculine" and indeed the often blakish culture surrounding gear shops, rave zones, and online discussion groups doesn't make it easy for females who want to produce and not just dance. Editor Analogue Tara Rodgers saw the gap in the market and set up Pinknoises.com as a platform for women in electronic music. The result is plenty of intelligent articles, equipment reviews, interviews and a media review site looking at how female artists are treated in the press. Go girl!



### Fast 'N' Bulbous

www.fastnbulbous.com

Est thy, John Cusack. Unlike the '90s best love songs-type list that littered the *High Fidelity* movie, *Fast 'N' Bulbous*, carved out in HTML, with love and sweat, delivers the mother of all rock lists. With thousands of entries and Top 100 lists from 1965 to 2001, *Fast 'N' Bulbous* has nerd stamped all over it. "I'm a notorious list maker. I feel compelled to keep track of music I like for the fear of forgetting stuff," explains the creator, Chicago's Anthony Van Dorston (aka Uncle Fester). As the title suggests, there is a heavy Beethoven connection, with the mighty Don Van Vliet roadily namechecked on almost every page. Dorston has been writing since 1986, and the site offers a fine selection of articles (such as a history of punk and a profile of Funkadelic), plus plenty of inspired rants and reviews. Obsessive music fandom at its very best.

ANNE HILDE MESEY

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## Going live: festivals, concerts, clubs in the flesh



The men and women from onkyo: Michiyo Yagi on koto (main), Ko Ishikawa on sho (top left), Otomo Yoshihide on everything else

## Тараногатна

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As Otonari's schedule in Japan was filled with round generators and musicians, a growing sense of feedback emerged. His solo act was called jokingly "Solo." The online collaboration became more than the sum of its parts as Otonari's endurance and sensibilities grew about his unrelentingly abetted by Mori Fushimi (percussively) and Toshimaru Nakamura (electronics). Otonari still packs conventional guitar, but his playing technique has little of the conventional about it. He didn't pluck with plectrum pack or pickie, but rammed the guitar down on the table where the main nose-maker was a venerable looking record deck. As he explained in his Inevitable Jubilee (*The Wire* 2012), he has largely dispensed with discs now letting the cartridge communicate directly with

**It's available.** He and I performed the same carpet of low register sounds over and over, more of more garish sounds over and over. In the middle, Funke worked diligently but largely ineffectually. We would hear her to better effect in the final *sadai-jin*.

The transition to the next set was an unassuming but effective coup de théâtre. As the electric storm died down and the pressure on our ears seems to begin to ease, a spotlight discovered Michiyo Yagi at the side of the stage, already playing so that the first delicate but insouciant notes of her koto solo swim up out of the ringing. It is always impressive to hear how this solid instrument, essentially half a tree trunk, with strings almost as tall as the average player — can produce such graceful, lilting lines. Michiyo's right hand, armed with metal picks, traced out mercurial patterns, while her left stretched sideways to

massive, and his solos from near the ragged bridges. It was a captivating performance, not least because it offered western ears expect to hear in music in a form which accommodated our accustomed way of listening.

By contrast, the methodologies of guitarist Taku Sugimoto (two-note generator Sachiko M and to a lesser extent, his virtuoso Ko Ishikawa) demanded a different way of listening to music or sound. Sachiko sat calmly behind two two-note generators, slowly rocking up the volume and mixing in additional layers, playing on the pain. An occasional forgoing middle or low frequency would have given respite, but she stuck exclusively to high tones, making listening something of an ordeal. I (my companion) dubbed the set "Sushi And The Banishes." I found discomfort alone, but her approach was fascinating. This was phre-

as music, somewhat akin to Steve Reich's *Pandulium Music*, though Sachio allowed herself interventions which Reich denied performers of his piece. As she faded in new frequencies, altering the loud colours to a barely perceptible degree, the sound vibrators slid in and out of sync, the merest break of the controls and pulsations and oscillations, into fresh relationships.

Guitarist Sugimoto never stood a chance. The British way of listening is to fill every pause, challenge every panissimo with a barrage of coughing, sneezing and giggling. The onkyo approach to music, like Morton Feldman's late work, needs small attentive audiences attuned to the most gentle agitations of the air. Sugimoto was once a high-gain noise merchant, but now uses his guitar principally as a resonator for various preparations. He consumed sounds that were

always brief, often muted, usually briskly articulated. Her less than ten-minute set had a handful of simple, intensely concentrated gestures, widely spaced, carefully considered, their fleeting distance of the stage left to float and fade. That's the theory anyway. The meditative intervals were, instead, filled with audience participation. At one point someone jumped onto the auditorium with such dogged persistence that I thought it might be part of the act. Supergroto responded (or rather, did not respond) with admirable good humour and restraint. Keshi James would not have been so polite.

Ko Ishikawa's stage etiquette was also courteous, his demeanour as formal as his instrument. She looks vaguely surreal, as miniature organ pipes sticking up in front of the player's face, with an eye either side. Well controlled breathing and the mechanics of the instrument produced quietly confident, gradually broadening outflows of sound.

Hoo sang three songs, set against various samples triggered by two manual devices and something that looked like a cut down version of Early Learning's Funky Fuzzies. Her set was thoroughly beguiling, allowing only the second piece struck me as having enough musical substance to fully compensate those of us unable to understand the lyrics. Ishikawa joined her for the third number, which she performed from a kneeling position, with gestures of elegantly restrained theatricality.

Abstraction took centre stage again when mixing desk manipulator Toshimaru Nakamura opened the second half. After a silent meditation, then, muted tones began to distill out of the air. Soon he started to mix in repetitive clicks, suggesting Yoshida's stylus stuck in a rut, not to grow. Almost as alien to Western ears was Yasuaki Oshima's set, mixing Dinosaur Folk songs with his own tradition-based compositions. The scene vocals were fragile beside his percussively metallic accompaniment on the three stringed shamisen.

The concert ended with Modulation, a piece devised for this tour, involving Otomo Yoshi Ishikawa, Sugimoto, Fugato and Sachiko M. Otomo, Yagi and Furuta bowed guitar, koto and cymbals respectively, while Sachiko's snarles were sometimes blended with sometimes whirled out. Ishikawa's sho Sugimoto continued with his microcosmic investigations, making much use of a large, half uncoiled spring threaded across the floor and kept taut by drawing its coiled end. Meanwhile Oshima mounted a cymbal on his turntable. All covered in a magical swirl of legato sounds, until the component parts began to diverge. Yagi punctuating the process with sharp, amplified plucked sounds from the koto, and Furuta setting up a glittering backdrop using vibas, gongs, cymbals and chime bowls. Tour organiser and Wire writer Ed Baxter says the programme only scratched the surface of the contemporary music scene in Japan, but it was an intriguing taste.

BARRY WHEEDEN

## Ata Tak Night Germany: Berlin/Podewil

How ironic that Berlin's Podewil, formerly an East German cultural centre for upcoming groups and now the city's premier experimental music venue, should host a showcase for Düsseldorf label Ata Tak, once the hub of a music scene that wallowed or even surpassed Berlin's. Emerging from an alternative gallery (Ata Tak being a babytalk variation of 'art attack') launched in Wuppertal in 1978, the label's founding figures, Der Plan members Frank Fenslermacher, Kurt Dahlke and Moritz R. released or collaborated with such groundbreaking Neue Deutsche Welle artists as DAF, Feilchen, Palas, Schaumburg (as well as Holger Hiller solo) and Andreas Dorau. As Der Plan, Fenslermacher, Dahlke and Moritz R. were Germany's own Residents, creating a simultaneously wide-eyed and knowing, gesamtdeutschwerk of savagely ironic synthpop, reference-leden graphics and surreal music videos. The trio contributed the music and Moritz R. the set decoration to Rainer Kribben's little shown 1980 film *Die Letzte Rache*, which received a rare screening here. Produced by German state TV's Kleine Fernsehspiel experimental slot (co-producers of Jim Jarmusch's *Stranger Than Paradise* among many others), the film's score leaves no stylistic or soundtrack technique stone unturned, what with its demented Alphons, crime jazz and cheesy electronic sci-fi doorknob ether. Plicey-Moosung the action or

transforming sound effects into music. Similarly, Kribben's black and white visuals gleefully raid everything from Weimar cinema (notably *Caligula*, *Metropolis* and *M*) to 70s midnight movie staples (*Il Topo* and *Eraserhead*). The degree of Moritz R.'s absurdist and art historically savvy visual sensibility becomes evident in Der Plan videos and sidejaws of recent album graphics projected in the hall. Unfortunately, these quirky triumphs of ingenuity and imagination over budget (always an Ata Tak maxim) are relegated to visual ambience on this night, when they deserve to be exhibited in their own right.

After Der Plan split in 1992, Moritz R. moved to Hamburg to focus on art, and Dahlke and Fenslermacher carried on Ata Tak, reusing possibly the boomiest GDs lounge music album ever (photographer Charles Webb's *Burry* — alongside neo-exotica by the likes of *The Bad Examples* and Don Tito Meinwies, as solo artist and producer Pynkator. Dahlke has released a handful of pioneering electronica albums since 1979 (set for release early this year). After Der Plan's dissolution he and Fenslermacher formed electro acoustics A Certain Frank, who are about to release their third album.

No surprise, then, that Pynkator's Podewil set was constituted from sounds influenced by ethnic musics and exotica. On "Smimming" he deployed Don Buxton's Thunder II, a non-keyboard synthesizer controlled by infrared wands, which he conducted with jerks of the

artist to weave a minimalist, madly surreal tableau. Things got a bit groovier for "Insult" where table-like and didgeridoo sounds, expanded on his pure electronics to such mesmerising effect that even the otherwise disquieting Pynkator couldn't help swaying to his beat.

The more eclectic A Certain Frank are also indebted to worldbeat, as Fenslermacher's turn at the ribbon (southern African thumb piano) showed, but their sound attack also included analogic synths generating phaser gun beats, luscious piano figures, cascading harp arpeggios, plus pre-recorded female vocals and feedback from a Japanese toy sampler. In concert they improvised on material from their first two albums, while pre-viewing songs from their imminent third CD *Nothing* (an attractive blend of breakbeats, downtempo, jazz fusion and lounge music) on this hearing. Coloured lights transformed Fenslermacher's silhouette into a James Bond tie sequence, while abstract video projections, uncannily in sync with the sound mix, offered an unobtrusive but effective backdrop.

Ocean Club member Thomas Fehlmann (formerly of Palas, Schaumburg and now a frequent silent partner in The Dots) contributed a characteristically classy turntable set to round off an evening which lovingly looked back to an era when such a stylistic cut 'n' mix was an aesthetic breath of fresh air, not a last gasp, while offering a glimpse into a less desperate future.

NATALIE GRAVEMOR

A Certain Frank: Kurt Dahlke and Frank Fenslermacher



PHOTO: KATALIN LŐRINCZ



**The Magnetic Fields**  
UK London, Zynk Theatre

Stephin Merritt, main muse behind the NYC-based Magnetic Fields and its three satellite groups, once related how Tom Lehrer had rebuked him for writing 69 love songs, let alone releasing them all on a triple CD set last year. The love song may be a necessary evil, said the songwriting satirist, but their concentration was to be avoided at all costs. Lehrer's response to the news that 69 Love Songs (released in the UK on Circus Records) was many critics' record of last year has not been recorded. That Merritt and his cohorts have just sold out four consecutive nights at a recently sold London theatre would no doubt send him into apoplexy.

The premise behind Merritt's love songs is deceptively simple: these are not love songs so much as songs that touch on love in all its multi-splendored manifestations. So it figures that the 69 songbook contains numbers about suicide, kleptomaniac obsession and voyeurism, plus enough murder ballads to bring the criminal courts to the point of collapse. Couched in a variety of modes, pure pop, concrete experiments and barbed parodies of World Music, jazz and punk and with a mordant wit that rivals Nick Cave's, Merritt's opus may delight in a knowing audience. And yet for all his manifold cleverness he loves songs out to the track with an elegantly transparent turn. With Merritt presenting the song cycle twice over two evenings (35 one night, 34 the next), The Magnetic Fields cut a sweetly bawdy swath on stage. Playing a ukulele and guitar, Merritt is a polite figure, with a low and affectless voice. His honey-toned partner Claudia Gonzon shares vocals, while guitarist John Woo and cellist Sam Davol provide a solid melodic

structure and, in the general absence of any drum tracks, a rhythmic base. Honorary Fieldsers—vocals Shirley Simms, Dudley Klute and Didi Bachtel with accordion Daniel Hordner—have him looking for all the world like a Mormon missionary who's just burst out of the closet—sit-seating in armchairs at the back of the stage waiting for their cues.

Although Merritt, a classically trained guitarist and pianist, started the group some ten years ago, they have been shamefully neglected in their native land. He clambers onto a high stool, looks balefully around and launches into a ukulele-powered "Absolutely Cuckoo." Outlining his narrative of romantic suicide in tightly rhyming couplets, it pretty much sets the cycle's tone. And Merritt gives the piece a lilting CBW feel. In this, as in the acid-rock fixated "When My Boy Walks Down The Street," "For We Are The Kings Of The Boulevard" (a mid-60s pop spoof sung by the flamboyantly gay Neil Barnard), a hallucinatory rock-savvy, "Mr. Nave Berni He Began" (inspired as a brilliantly measured set piece between Merritt and Gonzon), it's clear that emotion does have an undercurrent of if not history, then understanding. Merritt's strong sense of structure and timing is underlined almost oddly by the group's orchestration. Last year Merritt claimed that his two musical epiphanies had been a Tiny Tim gig and Emmentauze Neubauer's first NYC appearance, but ukuleles, banjos and doom-lured triangles? The arrangements certainly emphasize a commitment to a playful kind of experimentation.

Maybe there's a doser link: In writing songs about love while disclaiming the possibility that he himself might be in love, Merritt's music operates in a gap that he has emotionally forced open. The lightly introduced this motif on the first night of the second cycle with "The

Book Of Love." The song is gravely reprinted by way of an encore by a whale-croaked and unrecognizable Peter Gabriel. Yet it is apt that the second night sees one of his strongest songs "The Death Of Ferdinand De Saussure" (with its rhyme scheme pitting "closure" against "bulimia") given a funfuns intensity by a reworked-up cello. However, such contrivance is often offset by songs whose emotional content is undeniable. "I Can't Touch You Anymore" is mesmerizing in its desolation. Emptied of all ornament save Merritt's voice and a picked guitar, its bleakness shines out like some black sun. But Merritt's implicit model—postmodernised Broadway showtunes and sound alone songs like "Buddy Bunkley Dreams" or "Yeah! Oh, Yeah!"—provides the space that he's made out. Intrinsically his own.

LOUISE GRAY

## A Silver Mount Zion

UK Glasgow, King Tut's

Elihu: Godspoke's You Black Emperor's guitarist and visionary dogmatist, sits centre stage in a permanent hunch peeling monstrous reverberated chords from a beat-up sawing. A second guitarist huddles behind him and stage left, an angelic string quartet, which includes Godspoke's Sophie on violin and Thierry on acoustic bass, follow his every contention, matching his clumsy body moves with elegant sways and soft resonant bowings. In the grey-blue lights of this shabby venue, Elihu's hair looks like it's on fire, a haze of smoke and static that enhances his evangelical aura. They're halfway through a new track, a smoldering guitar piece that sounds like Fukushima at their most arid with a junc of supernatural terror of angels with

Molotov, when Elihu freezes, holding a last chord for seconds, going on eternity. The disinterested gush of the audience suddenly bursts: "He sounds like Kermit the frog," says one dumbbly. "I hope they've got chums on the next one," offers another jerk, and you're suddenly reminded just how much Godspoke's success really has become a creative hind.

Undoubtedly most people were here tonight to drink with their finger on the pulse in the presence of a Godspoke offshoot. Yet the music of A Silver Mount Zion is far too fragile to serve as any kind of social wallpaper. It's full of silence and space, while live there's a claustrophobic about them that is all the more endearing, a feeling that the group are really wrestling with their instruments in order to get something beautiful across. "Brown Chords Can Sing A Little," the opening track on their debut CD on Constellation, captures this mood perfectly. Beneath the chatter and buzz of the venue, Elihu sounds a lone static keyboard chord as if he's scoring the conversation while the strings blur in an extended attempt to levitate the group up and over the heads of the crowd.

The new songs are more visceral, heavier with blues, but still chew out the same obsessions, most particularly the secret links between eschatology and revolution, between apocalypse and revelation. Through the string arrangements are sedate and full of warmth, it's Elihu's vocal that renders all of his moving and hopeful. He has a genuinely disyncretic and expressive voice, and while your parents might compare him to a Muppets, anyone even half familiar with troubled-soul singers like Neil Young or Daniel Johnston will recognise the territory. It is unfortunate that the practicalities of bringing a real piano on tour are too prohibitive—you do miss the live natural decay that characterised the album. Yet there's something triumphant in the primative plink-plunk of Elihu's cheap keyboard. His playing is never melodically straightforward. He drops dissonant notes and full stops into pieces with a skewed compositional sense that recalls the gnostic reverberance of Moorad. Sure, it's a long set and the crowd rests restlessly throughout, but these songs need space and time to breathe, and the strings gloriously take forever expanding and receding the simplest of phrases away to feels like the music is going to combust.

The best moment, however, comes halfway through with an unadorned take on "Move Higher Place." As Elihu chips away at this keyboard, his voice slips out into a high-pitched burst. "Let our crowns be fed on plate glass and tear gas because the people united is a wonderful thing." Coming from this lone figure behind a little keyboard, without the track's atmospheric coating of the album, it is a heartbreakingly bare outburst, delivered without any trace of self-consciousness or irony. He pauses for a moment and looks out to the crowd. No one is listening. He bows his head and reaches for another broken chord.

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01 > 10 ICELAND, Reykjavik, Kitchen Motors Choral Project  
**MAY**  
16 > 31 IRELAND / Cork / Triskel Arts Centre / Intermedia Exhibition  
17 IRELAND / Cork / Triskel Arts Centre - performance  
22 IRELAND / DUBLIN - performance

**PART TWO**  
**SEPT** - Poland / Slovakia / Hungary / Croatia / Serbia / Turkey / Israel  
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# out there

February's selected festivals, live events, clubs and broadcasts

Aphex Twin



## UK Festivals

### Dedbeat Weekender

A little something for the weekend taking place on the Norfolk coast with a line-up including Aphex Twin, Death Charge, Andrew Wadsworth, Big Daddy Karie, Boys Menus, The Phordys, Jerru The Damsel, DJ Vadim, Luke Vibert, PJ Scuff, HJ Complex, PJ Thing, Kev Darge, Street Records DJs and many many more. Great Yarmouth Yachthall Holiday Park, 23-25 February. £85. 01493 853899

### In Between Time

A short festival of performance and sound art involving a series of installations, performances and events, including a pub quiz, a songwriting competition, singing do-robots and presentations and performances of location recordings. Bristol various venues. 8-10 February. Times/entry vary. 0117 929 9191

### National Review of Live Art

15th edition of Britain's longest running festival of live art will feature new sound and music works from Scanner and David Shire, Selva Weshort, Ansuman Boswa, plus artists from Japan, Mexico, USA, UK and Europe. Glasgow Arches, 14-18 February. Festival pass £25. Single day £7.50. 0141 221 4001

### Way Out West Weekender

A long weekend of jazz, classical, Indian music and improv soundtracks marking the return of the Rare Music Club. Pianist Keith Tippett's occasional series of sound misadventures. Guests include Tippett's Piano Quartet, The Dufay Collective, Paul Dunmall, Simon Picard, Tony Marsh, John Edwards, Philip Sheppard, Susanna Svanesson, Billy Reffman, HJ Blockbuster, Andrew Bull, Nina Burns Group, Suzanne Starobin, David Bedford and Julie Tippetts & Maggie Nicols microscoping to GW Pater's *Scores Of A Soul*. Bristol various venues, 1-4 February. Times/entry vary. 0117 944 5032. Web: [www.raremusic.org.uk](http://www.raremusic.org.uk)

### Sound Practice

A massive conference on sound, culture and environments in Devon. There will be presentations from P Murray Scholer, Peter Cusack, Philip Tagg & Karen Collins, Joe Banks, John Hall, Jean-François Augoyard and many many more workshops with Pauline Oliveros, Hildegarde Westenkamp & Florence Delaguy, Sero Altinto and Joshua Leeds & Alex Dorman and performances from Hildegarde Westenkamp & Pauline Oliveros, Danformation, Janek Scholer & Robert Hanson and Die Audio Gruppe. Dartington Hall Conference Centre and College of Arts, 16-20 February. Web: [www.soundpractice.org.uk](http://www.soundpractice.org.uk)

## International Festivals

### Bowels Of Noise

The third instalment of Kay Tanius' indie noise fest. Featured performers this go-round include Pincoya Diagonismo, His Name Is Alive, Felix Kubin, Kruti K2 and KK Null's new group Monster. DVD Japan, Tokyo. CA¥ 25 February. [www.mpor.com/en/](http://www.mpor.com/en/) [eharawata3@ntt.net](mailto:eharawata3@ntt.net)

### By:arm

This year's annual Norwegian music industry conference festival happens in dark, freezing Tromsø far above the Arctic Circle. Participating artists include Norwegian 8-boys Turghvinn, designer/electronic musician Kim Hortheim, Monopos, electronic duo Alag, Biosphere and a DJ set by The Wire Sound System. Norway. Tromsø various venues, 22-25 February. [www.by:arm.no](http://www.by:arm.no)

### Dangerous Waves: Art of Sound

A series exploring some art featuring works by Thurston Moore, Zeena Parkins & Nels Cline, Ron Kuvila, Elliot Sharp, David Moulton, Liz Philips, Arney Bonney and students and faculty at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. USA, Boston. SPFA, until 4 February. 001 617 267 6100. [www.sfmfa.edu](http://www.sfmfa.edu)

### Festival of Radio France Présences

Part of INA-GRF's 23rd cycle of electroacoustic music, this short festival will feature live electronics from Javier Alvarez, Tim Bracy, Samuel Sighicelli, Guilo Castagnoli and Luis Nason, and a performance of Hugues Dufourt's *Somme France*. Paris. Maison de Radio France, 6-7 February. Free. 033 1 56 40 29 88. Web: [www.radiofr.fr](http://www.radiofr.fr)

### Heisinki Sound

The 1st performance of this season of electronic music and audio art in the Finnish capital will feature electronic composer Monon Subotnick. Finland, Helsinki. Kaarna Museum, 17 February, 7pm, 00 358 9 17 336 500. [www.kaarna.fi](http://www.kaarna.fi)

### Transience

A sound art exhibition in Helsinki's stunning Kuusma Museum. Choreographing sound with specially designed installations will be David Cunningham, Danformation, Jon Frier, Patrick Kisk, Mike Makiala, David Weingerde and John Wynne. Finland, Helsinki. Kuusma Museum, from February 1. 00 358 9 17 336 500. [www.kaarna.fi](http://www.kaarna.fi)

## Special Events

### The Angels' Journey

Sound installation featuring sculptor Hans Benke. Northern's cemented angels on wheels modified around triph cars, with an electronic score made up from insected sounds composed by Gier Johnson. London. Loading Bay Gallery, 1-10 February. Q20 7960 0070

### Here And Now

This exhibition in deepest darkest Deptford, created by Australian artist Calan Stanley, features the work of Brandon LaBelle, Stanley Wendy Bornholt and David Allen. Each artist has created an installation focusing on the theme of 'capturing the moment' while attempting to break down the barriers between the spectator and the spectacle. London. Museum of Installation, until 24 February. Free. Q20 B692 8778. Web: [www.moi.org.uk](http://www.moi.org.uk)

### Interference

The Allen and The Lux present a night of renegade music and film focusing on plunderphonia and the history of sampling culture. Vicki Bennett's People Line. We will perform a collage of found imagery and sound, and there will be a screening of Craig Baldwin's notorious *Sonic Outlaws*, a 1985 documentary featuring Negativland, John Oswald, The Tapscott Bealies and EBN. London. Lux Centre, 15 February, 8pm. £5.13. Q20 7684 0201. Web: [www.lux.org.uk](http://www.lux.org.uk)

## On Stage

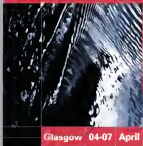
**Amal Gansaal Ensemble** *Indigene*: electronic music from Stephen Tawiah, Gaku Knight, Karl Blake, Gavin Mitchell and DORRIN. London: House Hospital, 13 February, 7.30pm. £6.55. Q20 7833 3644. e-mail: [popculture@ethicsof.com](mailto:popculture@ethicsof.com). Web: [www.ethicsof.com](http://www.ethicsof.com)

**Andersen/Tsakopoulos/Manshall Trio** *Former*: Jon Gursonek, bassist, Arnd Andersen leads a trio with Vassilis Tsakopoulos and John Manshall. Cambridge. Kettles Yard (14 February). Nottingham. Congregational Centre (15). Birmingham. Mac (17). Bristol. Amalfi (19) and London. Pizza Express (20-21).

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**EAR** Sonic Boom continues his experimental  
audio research. London: Soho 16 February  
8pm. £7.55. 020 7392 9032

**ECAT Ensemble** Oudub concert by the  
New Music ensemble featuring works by Louis  
Andersen, Peter Nelson and John McCus  
Edinburgh: Queen's Hall 12 February  
7.45pm. £9/14. 0131 668 2019

**Fet Cat Records** An evening in the  
company of the experimental electronic label,  
with Janek Schaefer, Antenna Farm and  
Duplo Romo. Newcastle: Cully 1 February  
8pm. £5. 0191 230 4474

**Gallon Drunk/Barry Adamson/2nd**  
**Geo** Triple header featuring bebop/cadent  
trump, imaginary soundtracks, and  
spatierbreaks from Wajid Yawen. London:  
Garage 16 February. £7.50. 020 7607  
1818

**Ghost Music** Jan Koprowski's jazz quartet  
make a rare appearance in their home town  
Nottingham: Nottingham Theatre, 1 February  
8pm. £8.50/15. 0115 967 0114

**Goldtrump** Ethereal electronic torch songs  
from Mute duo. Dublin: Pina. Centre (14  
February), Glasgow: Coter Theatre (16),  
Manchester: Old Grange (17), Leeds:  
Rocket (18), Nottingham: Soho (20), Bristol:  
Flower and Fren (21), London: LUX (22)

**George Hissim** Marking the release of his  
new *Solo* CD, the saxophonist plays in a duo  
with Richard Leigh Harris. London: British  
Music Information Centre, 22 February  
7.30pm. £6/14. 020 7459 8567

**J/O** Experimental electronic music  
from Japan and Europe. featuring  
Christopherson, Lantieri, Guadagnoli,  
Electrochrome and more. London: Spitz, 13  
February. 8pm. £5. 020 7392 9032. Web:  
www.joimusic.net

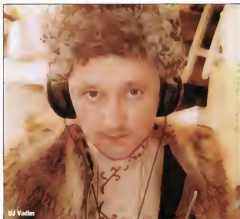
**Stephen Malkmus** Former Pavement  
frontman plays with Daniel's Justice.  
Finsbury: London Garage, 12 February  
020 7607 1818

**Waylon Marshall/London Center**  
**Jazz Orchestra** The trumpeter and crew  
celebrate the trad jazz canon over three  
nights. London: Barbican, 9-11 February  
7.30pm prices vary. 020 7638 8891

**New Noise** New Music duo perform a series  
of world premieres. Edinburgh: Dead Concert  
Hall (13 February), Wilshire Music Centre  
(18), London: Blackheath Concert Halls (20),  
London: Wigmore Hall (21)

**OutkastBig Boy** and Ore 3000 bring their  
Atlanta-based duo to Brighton for the first time  
London: Mean Fielding, 11 February. 5.10. 020  
7434 9552

**Simon Pinedar/Paul Rogers/Tony**  
**Marsh** Hard bodied London Improviso



DJ Vedim

London: Red Rose Club 25 February  
8.30pm. £5. 020 7263 7265

**Ernest Ranglin** The legendary Jamaican  
jazz guitarist plays material from his *Modern*  
*Answers* to *Old Problems* album. London:  
Queen Elizabeth Hall 14 February 7.45pm  
£17.50/15.50. 020 7960 4242

**St Valentine's Eve** *De Maccare* Indie label  
Southern hosts a showcase with The Action  
Time, Billy Mahone, 90 Day Men and Les  
Savy Fav. London: 93 Feet East, 13 February  
7pm. £7. 020 7247 3293

**Keith Tippett** Jazz pianist performs original  
compositions with a piano quartet and his group  
Muyassar. London: Jazz Cafe (16 February), Leeds:  
Warehouse (14), Beaumont Arms (15),  
Dartington Arts Centre (21), Manchester: Royal  
Northern College of Music (23)

**Types of Wrath** The kinetic of Tate  
Brown's William Blake album features music  
from Jah Wobble, Billy Bragg, Alex James and  
Dave Rowntree of Blur, Simon Boswell and  
the London Gay Mens Choir, as well as magi-  
cabinet weirdness from Alan Moore, Ian  
Scribler and Brian Glick. London: Purlin  
Room 2 February, 7pm. £18/15. 020  
7960 4242

**Club Spaces**

**Amuro City East** Buss driven eclectic  
from Post Dole (Liffelife), Add N To (Kis)  
Barry 7. Barry Ashworth, South, Richard  
Norms, Emergency Girl and Sophie Woolley  
London: Cargo 8 February 7.30pm-1am  
£7/15

**Baggage Reclaim** Richard Sanderson's  
post-improvisational featuring Mimosa  
London: 12 Bar 18 February. 8pm. £5/14  
020 8463 0490

**Reyord** The team behind Sonic Ploak  
Experiment presents a multimedia night at the

ICA, with DJ sets from Cristian Vogel, Andrew  
Weatherall, Kieran Heiders, Barry 7  
Deastronaut and Kaffe Matthews live  
performances from Echoboy, Coephus and DJ  
Downfall, performance art from Emergency  
Girl and Sophie Woolley, and films from the  
Halloween Society. London: ICA, 2 February  
7pm-1am. £10/18. 020 7930 0493

**Breakeast Culture** Nu breaks and drum  
n bass from Decoder & Substance, Pure  
Rockers, Koshen Alpha, Decoy, Adonis and  
Karna Dross. Bristol: Theika, 2 February  
10pm-4am. £7/15. 07967 539901

**Genophille** The Bohman Brothers alter  
changing Improv night with Hugh Metcalfe &  
Mark Sanders and Rest (12 February),  
Caroline Kriebel & John Edwards and Simon  
Vincent & Graham Halliwell (19) and  
Lionel Seale & Roger Boulanger and The  
Borman Brothers (26), London: Bormington  
Centre. Mondays: 8pm. £4/13. 01932  
571 333

**Consume** New monthly night of live  
experimental music from underground  
featuring Pioneers (1), Analesthetics, Neck  
Doppler, Opaque and DJ Pet Tombarola  
Glasgow: 13th Note Cafe 23 February, 8pm-  
midnight. £2. 0141 400 9441

**Early Doors** The New Years Bankruptcy  
Massive's night of the three Os: down tempo,  
duo and disco. London: Bessy Tretlow, 3  
February. 7pm-11pm. 10pm. 020 7253 4285

**Kinkies** Gads improv shenanigans, with  
Max Factory, Dean Dean & Tony Blanco and  
Dot Dash Dot (1 February), Phil Harrison &  
Bob Cobbing Duo and Alpine Ascents (8)  
Mexico Platts & Steve Noble, Free Base &  
Alan Williamson and Max Factory & Geoff  
Barnard (15), Nigel Burdell's Flapet  
Orchestra, Yumi Hara Tom Arturs & Simon  
Vincent, and Peter Beverley & Keith Bray  
(22), Extreme Quack! Swiss Films featuring  
Glacial Crack, and Musical Excrement (23)

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## Only Connect : A Series of Extraordinary Live Events

Thursday 1 March

### Sound on Film Live *World Premiere*

Hal Hartley / Louis Andriessen  
Nicolas Roeg / Adrian Utley of Portishead  
The Brothers Quay / Karlheinz Stockhausen  
Werner Herzog / John Tavener

The live world premiere of four new short films by some of the world's leading filmmakers, with specially commissioned soundtracks, performed by artists including Electra, BBC Symphony Orchestra and Westminster Cathedral Choir.

Saturday 10 March and Sunday 11 March

### Ennio Morricone

One of the most influential figures in film music makes his first ever live UK performance, conducting the Rome Symphony Orchestra and Lyddia Chorus including two of his concertos works, plus some of his greatest film scores including *The Mission*, *Once Upon a Time in the West* and *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*.

Thursday 22 March

### Outsider Art/Music *World Premiere*

Joe Coleman / The Delgados  
Joe Coleman / Carlo Gesualdo  
Henry Darger / Harry Partch  
Wayley Willie - Live

The art of the outsider - untrained visionaries, eccentrics and recluses who work beyond the imposed margins of society.

Friday 23 March

### Ornette Coleman

The free jazz legend returns to London for the first time in five years, to perform with his Trio (with Bernardo Coleman and Charnett Moffett) plus a new project, Global Expressions, with his Trio plus special guests including Badal Roy and Prokober Karakar.

Monday 25 March

### Naked Lunch *live to projection*

In this specially subtitled screening of David Cronenberg's *Naked Lunch*, Howard Shore conducts the Ornette Coleman Trio and BBC Concert Orchestra in a live performance of his score to this cult film.

Saturday 31 March

### Asian Dub Foundation/La Haine

Asian Dub Foundation take inspiration from the stark and violent world of Kurosawa's film *La Haine* to create and perform extraordinary new music. Event includes a screening of *La Haine*.

Monday 5 April

### Tom Zé/Tortoise

Wynward godfather of Brazilian Tropicalia meets the Chicagoan post-rock pioneers.

Call for a full brochure of all events 020 7638 8891  
www.ticketweb.co.uk

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- Broadcast
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- ESG
- The Ex
- Femi Kuti
- Lambchop
- Mike Ladd
- Prefuse 73
- Savath and Savalas
- The Sea and Cake
- Sun Ra Arkestra
- Tara Key & Rick Rizzo
- Television
- Tortoise
- Yo La Tengo

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Tickets are £100.00 per person plus booking fee for a weekend pass to include festival entrance & chalet accommodation.

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Ticketline 0161 532 1111

Foundation 



London Susex, Thursdays 020 8806 8216  
www.thelinkinfreeze.co.uk

**Kosmische** The usual Krautrock tomlolory with Jankory Ausgung: Philip Screwdriver, Horton Jupiter, Felix Alan and Alex Paterson London Utopians at the Garage 24 February 8pm-3am \$5 020 7607 1818

**Lyriol Lounge** DJ Pogos venerable HipHop night featuring nobody's equal Big Dadey Kane London Soca 22 February 8pm-3am \$12 50165, 020 8536 0630

**PM Scientists** The return of one of London's premier basement nights, with DJ Zinc, Stanton Warriors, Lazarus, Rob Mello, Reach Yulea, Ph. Morris and Jay Da Flea London Herald bi-weekly Thursdays 8pm-2am \$5 020 7613 4462

**Rehabilitation** Law & Aude Records alternative night out, with Seongbeoy & Tench, Ryo Co, Antisocial and Richard Jessop London Founery 2 February 8pm-midnight free 020 7739 6900

**The Sprawl** Cutting edge electronics, with Hazard, SETI, BitPhone and Si-Ju do London Global Cafe & Restaurant 7 30pm-midnight \$3.12 020 7287 2242

**Sub Dub** Dub/dub roots and steppers rhythms from Inator Steppas and crew Leeds West Kilburn Centre 9 February 10pm-3am \$5 0113 262 9465

**2:13 Club** Relaunch of the oddly scheduled improv club featuring Charlotte Hug, Tom Cluett and John Beckett in trio, duo and solo Wymondham Sound 323 3 February 11pm 14133, 020 8348 9595

## Incoming

**Animal Encounters** As part of the Pandaemorphism Festival for the moving image, The Wire and the Lux Centre present an evening of sonic, zoology, wildlife recordings and visuals, courtesy of ex-Cabaret Voltaire member Chris Watson and Youth supreme Jon Wozniak London Lux Centre 6 March 7pm 020 7666 0201

**(K-R-K-K) Festival** Improv, electronics, film and installations in the Lowlands featuring KofG, Senking, Richard Youngs, Adbi vs Kohn, Alastair Galtway, Vole Robot, Mithras, Kern, Jan Van Den Dobbelaer, Hott De Genaro and Kees Vanderborght Belgium Hasselt Zaal België 3 March 00 32 11 224161 www.kraak.net

**The Wire Sessions Live** The Wire's series of events at the South Bank Centre continues with an evening of low and therapy. Delivering the bass transmissions will be Juh Wobble, John Liebertson, Pore and Burns Friedman, London Queen Elizabeth Hall 28 March 7 45pm \$12 50110 020 7960 4242

Our Three items for inclusion in the March issue would reach us by Friday 9 February

**NB Listings information MUST include a contact phone number, start time and ticket price. Listings cannot be taken over the phone**

## Radio

### National

#### BBC Radio 1 92.9 FM

**John Peel** Mondays-Thursdays 7pm-midnight The now venerable mix of indie, indie, Techno, Jungle, Electronic, dub and the legendary sessions

**Giles Peterson** Wednesdays midnight-2am Up-and-down tempo beats, experimental drum'n'bass, funk, psychedelic soul and plenty more in between

**Fabio & Grooverider** Fridays 2-4am Two hours of vanguard drum'n'bass from two of the scene's longest serving DJs

**Westwood Rag Show** Fridays 11pm-2am/Saturdays 8pm-midnight Terry's HipHop tips

#### BBC Radio 3 90.8 FM

**Late Junction** Mondays-Thursdays 10.15-midnight Vinty Sharp and Fiona Talkington present news and discussion of a diverse musical selection

**Jazz Legends** Fridays 4-5pm Archive recordings chosen by current jazz stars, presented by Alyn Shotton. Selections this month: Steve Laddor (12 February), Claude Deppa (9), Norma Winstone (16), Michael Gibbs (23)

**Jazz Live-Up** Saturdays 4-5pm Jazz magazine presented by Stacey Kent and Claire Martin

**Jazz File** Saturdays 6-8pm Jazz documentary series featuring the Central Avenue Sound of Los Angeles

**Mixing It** Saturdays 10.45-11.30pm New music mix with Robert Sandall and Mark Russell

**Jazz On 3** Saturdays 11.30pm-1am Modern jazz in session and concert. This month: For All The Saints (3 February), Mike Stern (10), Dave Liebman (17), Medeski, Martin & Wood (24)

**World Routes** Sundays 11.15pm-midnight New World Music magazine programme, hosted by Lucy Duran with regular guest Andy Kershaw

### Regional

#### BBC Lancashire 95.5/102.7/104.3 FM, 89.5 MW

**On The Wire** Saturdays 8-10pm The Wire's resident dub columnist Steve Barker mixes dub, experimental electronics, out rock, free jazz, World Music and more

#### BBC Merseyside 95.8 FM, 160.5 MW

**PM5** Sundays midnight-2am Formerly the Live World Music, Roger Hill's mix of avant rock, psychedelia, warped Ambient and global gems in themed sequences

#### BBC Scotland 92.4-94.7 FM

**From Busstop To HipHop** Tuesdays 8-9pm David Sellers drops jazz and new beats

**Beat Patrol** Sundays 8-9pm Peter Aston plays independent music across the spectrum

#### Cable Radio 89.8 FM (Millon Keynes)

**The Garden Of Earthly Delights** Mondays 10pm-midnight Shane Quent's blend of avant rock to electronic, exotica, with bizarre soundscapes

#### Kiss 100 FM (London)

**Patrick Forge** Sundays 10pm-midnight Eclectic jazz-not-jazz mix

**Front and Centre** Sundays 10pm-midnight 2am Breakbeats, Jungle, drum'n'bass

**Shannon & Friends** Mondays 2-4am Jazz, Jungle, cyber-soul, breakbeats and electric fed grooves from the lively launch

**Andy C, Kenny Ken, LTJ Bukem and Ray Keith** Wednesdays 2-4am Drum'n'bass

#### London Live 95.9 FM

**Destination It** Mondays, Wednesdays/Fridays 7pm-midnight Ross Allen spins a motley selection of new music, from space jazz and minimalism to electronica and leftfield pop

**Solid Steel** Mondays midnight-2am The Ninja Tune posse's tasty stew of funk, jazz, breaks and beats seasoned with nutty speech beats

**Charlie Gillett** Saturdays 8-10pm Rock, roots, dub, World Music, blues, R&B and more

#### Surf 102 FM (Brighton)

**Totally Wired** Tuesdays 10pm-1am Eclectic selection of leftfield independent dance tunes laced with 60s/70s funk/bass

**The Chill Factor** Sundays 5-7am Dave Craske's continuous mix of drum'n'bass, dub, HipHop, classical, electronica and more

Links to Met radio broadcasts, both internet and internet-only, can be found on The Wire Website: [www.thewire.co.uk](http://www.thewire.co.uk)







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THE WIRE

# epiphanies

Dave Mandl recalls stalking some soon-to-be luminaries of NYC's downtown scene, The Public Servants



Public Servants, early 80s. Left to right: Bill Horvitz, Dave Sewelson, Richard Dworkin, Shelley Hirsch, Philip Johnston, Dave Hofstra

N YC early 1980 punk legends The Sits are performing at rock haunt Irving Plaza tonight, and it's the musical event of the month. My friends and I are running a bit late, when we arrive, the opening act is already on and the place is packed. After ten minutes slithering through the crowd, the four of us manage to score a spot up front and start to settle in. Only then do I get a whiff of what's happening up on stage. What the —

The first thing I notice are the music stands (music stands? At Irving Plaza?). Standing behind them are two saxophone players dressed in dated jazz hipster style, with hats and suit jackets and skinny ties. One of them is a tiny guy squonking hard on an even tinier soprano sax, flanking him is a giant nearly twice his height, sporting a huge walrus moustache and blowing on a massive baritone sax. To the left of this pair is the vocalist, a crazy old lady with wild hair dressed in a long shroze. She's wandering around the stage and rolling her eyes, and she's alternately moaning and rambling incoherently to herself and, um, yodeling. She's apparently lost down the bottle of pills her doctor has just prescribed for her. Her delirious monologue is interrupted from time to time by the sax duo, who periodically stop honking to reply to her in unison in a kind of "Mutt and Jeff" Greek chorus.

Just behind the Subway Lady is the group's scowling guitarist. His hair's a bit too long and he's firing off jazz-

funk licks (jazz-funk licks?) on a very rockist Gibson Les Paul, which is being run through a phase-shifter or something. And the bass guitarist — he's playing a fretless bass (a fretless boss?), and during his break he uses an ashtray as a slide. They're playing in various strange time signatures, and they're all incredible musicians. It's just too good. Who are these people?

Even at 20 years old I wasn't the type to get overly involved in following groups, but The Public Servants nearly made a groupee out of me. They appeared at one of the most exciting times in New York's musical history and somehow combined pop, funk, swing, Beeheart and avant garde performance art in a way that would have been unimaginable a couple of years before. They were great. Not the biggest clubber, I nevertheless caught them live every chance I could. A couple of years later they had vanished without a trace, leaving behind only one self-produced single ("Jungle Hotel"/"A Mistake") that's now impossibly rare. Few people who were around at the time even seem to remember them. Every Web search I've done has come up absolutely empty. I've never seen an article about them in my life.

This would all be unremarkable enough but for the fact that The Servants all went on to become, or work with, the cream of New York's experimental music scene. Philip Johnston and Dave Sewelson on saxophones, Shelley Hirsch on vocals, Dave Hofstra on bass, Bill Horvitz on guitar and Steve Moses (later

replaced by Richard Dworkin) on drums. Their combined performing credits and discographies could probably fill this magazine, but would include the following: John Zorn (also an early Servants member), Wayne Horvitz (Bill's brother), Guy Kluwecek, Elliott Sharp, Anthony Coleman, Peter Bleigold, The Microscopic Sector, Bill Fisel, David Weinstein, Bobby Previte, Eugene Chadbourne, Myra Melford, Jason Hwang, Ioue Mori, Zoema Parkins and Fred Frith. Former Public Servants have also done music for innumerable dance performances, film soundtracks and theatre works.

The members' musical backgrounds were predictably eclectic. Prior to forming The Servants, several of them had been playing in swing, Qandoo and bebop groups, but Johnston (primary Servants songwriter and co-bandleader with Hirsch) was also a big Captain Beefheart fan. Horvitz and Johnston had played improvised music together in California, where they met Sewelson. Moses had played with No Wave pioneers The Contortions and an earlier James Chance outfit, Flaming Youth. Hirsch had, as a teenager in the early '70s, worked with a theatre group doing "experimental sound environments" — this after dropping out of school and travelling to San Francisco to study Japanese kabuki, only to find out that all women's kabuki roles are played by men.

When The Public Servants formed in 1979, the planets seemed perfectly lined up. New York was in the throes of the more non-conformist post-punk years, where scot-yodeling or playing (sort of) jazz arrangements from charts was suddenly OK. (Actually, according to Johnston an earlier swing band of his had been well received by San Francisco's punks, mainly because their repertoire included infamous '30s contraband numbers like "Reefer Man" and "Who Put The Berzerk in Mrs. Murphy's Ovaltine?") They loved the drug songs," he recalls. "It was a period when most musical rules were being broken and musicians with chops were gaining new respect — as seen, for example, in punk groups like The Ramones and Talking Heads, both of whom augmented their line-ups with session players. The decision to go in a more pop direction with The Servants was further inspired by the fact that there were few jazz clubs but dozens of rock venues in New York City. As Johnston says, "You go where the work is, but in your own way." Their breakup two years later was completely amicable — in fact most of them play together in various combinations to this day.

There is at least a glimmer of hope that a retrospective CD might someday appear and yank the group out of undeserved obscurity. According to Johnston, there are a handful of mid-'80s cassette recordings and possibly more studio tracks floating around (though at this point he hasn't considered anything beyond "best of" tapes for friends). A parallel that comes to mind is the legendary Wilde Flowers, the unknown Canterbury group whose members would go on to create the influential Canterbury Sound of Soft Machine and Caravan. That group's original recordings were first released nearly 30 years after the fact, in 1994. After 20 years, maybe the world is ready for a full-length Public Servants release?

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